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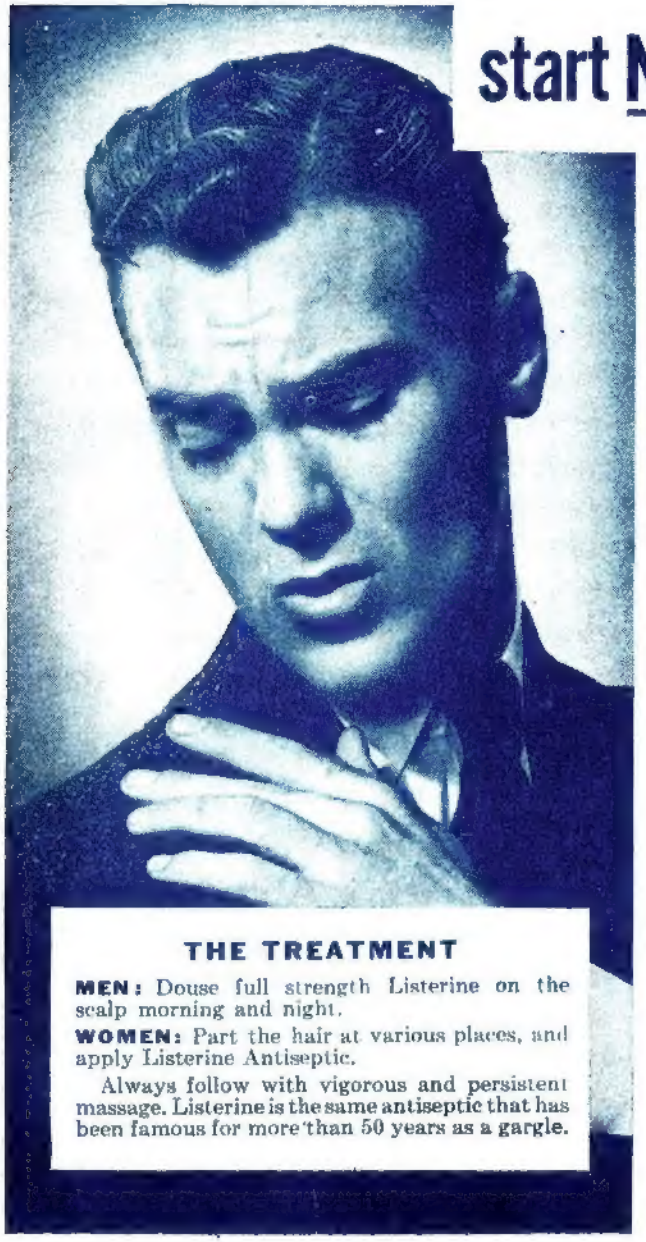

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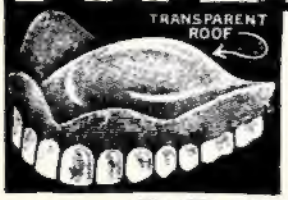

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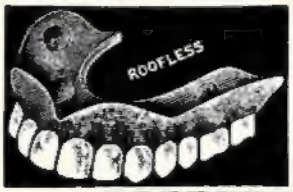

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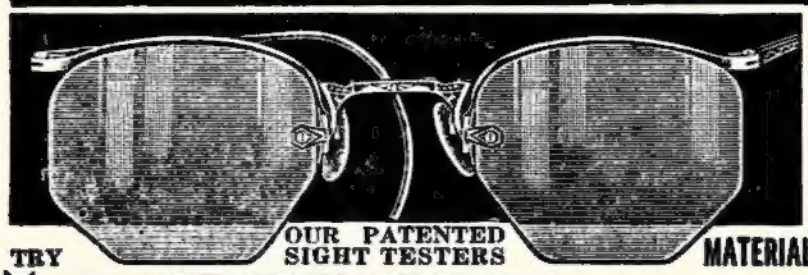

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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Strange Keys to the Powers of the Universe

"GOD GEOMETRIZES," said an ancient sage. Within the straight line, curve, and angle—and their combinations—exist the forces of creation. These *secret symbols* contain the mysterious laws of the universe. Upon their right use—or the neglect of them—the success or failure of every *human enterprise* depends.

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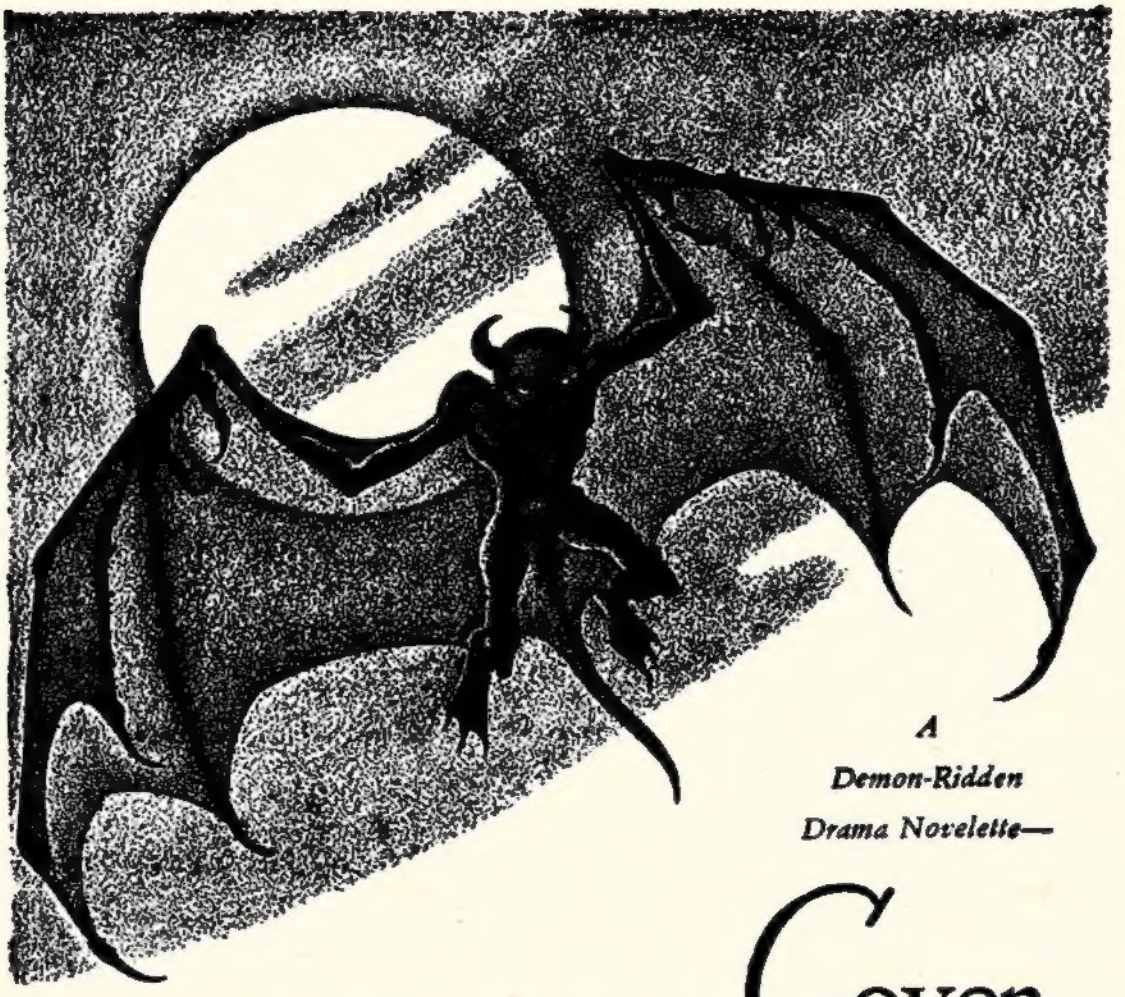


A

Demon-Ridden

Drama Novelette—

Coven

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

. . . They pledge themselves to frequent the midnight assemblies. These conventicles or covens were bands or companies of witches, composed of men and women, apparently under the discipline of an officer. . . .

—HISTORY OF WITCHCRAFT AND DEMONOLOGY, *Montague Summers.*

CHAPTER I

The Cursed Damozel

WASN'T Shiloh supposed to be named after an angel or a devil? Angels and devils were both there, sorting the two armies through for who should live and who die, who go to heaven and who go to hell. We Southerners won the first day and part of the second, even after they'd killed General Albert Sidney Johnston. When I say he was about as great as General Lee, I expect to be believed. When we fell back, Bedford Forrest sent some of us to save a field piece that Bragg's artillery left behind. But the Yankees got there fustest with the mostest men. They carried off the gun, and two or three of us Tennessee cavalry with it.

They were bivouacking on the field—sundown, April 7, 1862. I was marched

When you hear the flip-flop of giant membranes, and the faraway chatter of inhuman jaws. . . . When you see a winged shape larger than any creature that flies. . . . You may know that "The Flying Horned One" is abroad—and that the gates of hell are open!

far back. Passing a headquarters, I saw a fateful little man with a big cigar—General Grant. With him was a taller, red-whiskered man, who was crying. Someone said he was Sherman, but Sherman never seemed to me like a man who would cry over any sorrow, his own or another's.

This introduction is jumbled. So was my mind at the time. I must have looked forlorn, a skinny gray-clad trooper plundered of saber, carbine and horse. One of the big blue cavalrymen who escorted the prisoners, leaned down from his saddle and rubbed the heel of his hand on my feebly fuzzy cheek.

"Little Johnny Reb's growing some nice black whiskers to surprise his sweetheart," he said, laughing.

"I haven't got a sweetheart," I snapped, trying to sound like a big soldier. But he laughed the louder.

"Hear that, boys?" he hailed the others of the escort. "This little feller never had a sweetheart." They mingled their cackles with his, and I wished I'd not spoken. They repeated my words again and again, tagging on sneers and merriments. I frowned, and tried not to cry. This was at dusk, the saddest time of day. We'd been marched back for miles, to some sort of reserve concentration in a tiny town.

"We've robbed the cradle for sure," the big blue cavalryman was saying to friends he met. "This little shaver—no sweetheart, he says!"

A new gale of laughter from towering captors all around me. It hushed suddenly at a stern voice:

"Bring that prisoner to me."

He rolled out from between two sheds, as heavily and smoothly as a gun-limber.

He was a short, thick man in a dragoon jacket and one of those little peaked Yankee caps. There was just enough light to show me his big beard and the sergeant's stripes on his sleeve.

"Bring him along," he ordered again. "March the others to the stockade."

A moment later, he and I stood alone in

the gloom. "What's your name?" he asked.

"High Private Cole Wickett," I replied. A prisoner could say that much. If he asked about my regiment, or the conditions of the army— But he didn't. His next question was: "How old are you?"

"Fifteen next birthday." Again no reason to lie, though I'd told the recruiting sergeant eighteen.

"Fourteen years, and some months," the big man figured it out. "Come with me."

He put a hand the size of a hay-fork on my shoulder, and steered me into a back yard full of soldiers playing cards by firelight. He paused, and scolded them for gambling. Any sergeant in Forrest's command who had tried that would have been hooted at, maybe struck at—we Confederates respected God and General Johnston and Bedford Forrest, and scorned everyone else. But these men put away the cards and said, "Yes sir," as if he had been an officer. He marched me on into the house beyond the yard, and sat me in a chair in what had been the kitchen.

There he left me. I could hear him talking to someone in the next room. There was a window through which I might have climbed. But it was dark, and I was tired, hungry, sick, and not yet fifteen. I couldn't have fought my way back through Grant, Sherman and the rest of the Yankees. I waited where I was until the sergeant opened the door and said, "Come in here, Wickett."

THE front room was lighted by one candle, stuck in its own grease on a table. There sat a tall, gray officer with a chaplain's cross for insignia. He was eating supper—bread, bacon and coffee. My eyes must have been wolfish, for he asked if I'd have some. I took enough to make a sandwich, and thanked him kindly. Then the chaplain said, "My boy, is it true what Sergeant Jaeger heard? That you're only a child, and never had a sweetheart?"

I stuck my chin out and stood up straight. The Yankees must be worse than all our Southern editors and speech-makers claimed, if even a preacher among them made jokes about such things. "Sir," I said, keeping my voice deep in my chest, "it's none of your business."

"But it is my business," he replied solemnly, "and the business of many people. Upon your answer, Cole, depends an effort to help some folk out of awful trouble—northern and southern both—and to right a terrible wrong. Now will you reply?"

"I don't know what you mean," I returned, "but I never even thought much about girls. What's wrong with that?"

"Nothing's wrong with it," answered the big sergeant named Jaeger. "You should be proud to say that thing, Wickett, if it's really true."

"Sergeant," I sputtered, "I'm a southern gentleman. If you and I were alone, with horses and sabers, I'd teach you to respect my word."

His face grew as dark as his beard, and he said, "Respect your elders and betters, youngster. So says the Bible."

"The catechism, not the Bible, Sergeant," corrected the chaplain. "Cole, it's only that we must be dead sure." He pushed a black-bound book across the table toward me. "This is the Bible. Do you believe in the sanctity of an oath."

"My word's good, sir, sworn on the Bible or not," I told him, but I put my hand on the book. "Must I swear something?"

"Only that you told the truth about never having a sweetheart," he said, and I did so. The chaplain put away the book, and looked at Sergeant Jaeger.

"Something tells me that we have the help we needed, and couldn't be sure of in our own forces," he said. "Take care of this boy, for we're lost without him."

He went out. Sergeant Jaeger faced me.

He was no taller than I, even then, but about twice as broad.

"Since you're a man of your word, will you give your parole?" he asked.

I swallowed the last bite of bacon, and shook my head. "I'll escape," I announced, "as soon as there's light enough."

"Will you give me your parole until sunrise?" he almost pleaded.

Wondering, I gave it. He put his hand on my shoulder again, steered me to a narrow stairway and up to a little room the size of a pantry. There was a cot with a gray blanket, Union army issue, on it.

"Sleep here," he said. "No, no questions —I won't answer them. Be ready for orders at an hour before dawn."

He left me. I took off my tunic and boots, and stretched out on the cot. Still puzzling over things, I went to sleep.

I woke to the touch of a hand, cold as a washrag, on my brow. Somehow there was light enough to see a woman standing there. She wore a frosty white dress and veil, like a bride's. Her face was still whiter.

I saw a straight, narrow-cut nose, a mouth that must be very red to be so darkly alive, and eyes that glowed green. Perhaps the eyes gave the light. I sat up, embarrassed.

"I was told to sleep here, ma'am," I said. "Is this your house?"

"Yes," she whispered, "it is my house." She sat on the edge of the cot. Her hand moved from my face to my shoulder. Her grip was as strong as Sergeant Jaeger's. "Your name is Cole Wickett. You are a brave soldier, but you never had a sweetheart."

I was tired of hearing about it. I said nothing, and she went on:

"I will be your sweetheart." And she put her arms around me.

She was beautiful, more than anyone I had ever seen. But when she came that close I felt a horrible sick fear. Perhaps it was the smell of deadness, as of a week-old battlefield. Or all of them.

I wriggled loose and jumped off the cot. She laughed, a little gurgle like water in a cave.

"Do not be afraid, Cole. Stand where you are."

She, too, rose. She was taller than I. Her eyes fixed mine, and I could not move. If you want to know how I felt, stare for a while at some spot on the wall or floor. After a moment, you'll have trouble looking away. It's called hypnotism, or something. She came near again, and this time I did not shrink when she put her hands on my shoulders.

"Now," she said.

Then Sergeant Jaeger opened the door, took one look, and began to say something, very rapidly and roughly. It sounded like Bible verses: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God—"

The woman shrieked, high and ear-tingling, like a bat. She let go of me.

She was gone. It was like a light being blown out, or a magic-lantern image switched from a screen.

I stared stupidly, like a country idiot. Jaeger cleared his throat, and tugged his beard. "That was close," he said.

"Who was she?" I asked, and the words had a hard time forming in my throat.

"Somebody whose call we'll return," he put me off gruffly. "She thought she'd destroy the one power we're counting on. It's time to strike back."

I FOLLOWED him outside. The night was black, but the early-morning stars had wheeled up into heaven. We passed two different sentries, and came through the sleeping street of the little town to a church, either ruined or shell-smashed. Beyond was a burying ground, grown up in weeds and walled around with stone. At the broken-down gate stood the chaplain,

He held the bridle of a chunky black stallion colt, not quite full grown.

"I can vouch for the beast," he greeted Sergeant Jaeger. "It is sad that we watch our animals so much more carefully than our own children."

"This night I almost failed in my own duty of watching," replied Jaeger in a tired voice. To me he said, "crawl out of those clothes. Don't stare. Do as I say."

By this time there had been so much strangeness and mystery that I did not argue. I shucked my uniform, and the predawn air was cold on my bare skin. The chaplain motioned for me to mount. I did, and he led the colt into the burying ground.

There were wreaths and wrappings of mist. Through them I saw pale, worn-out tombstones. We tramped over them. It wasn't polite nor decent, but I saw that the chaplain and the sergeant—he came behind, carrying some shovels and a mattock—meant business. I kept my mouth closed. Riding the colt, I was steered across that burying ground, and across again.

In the middle of the second crossing, the colt planted his hoofs and balked.

Jaeger, bringing up the rear, struck with the handle of a shovel. The colt stood firm. The chaplain tugged in front, Jaeger flogged behind. The colt trembled and snorted, but he did not move.

The chaplain pointed. A grave-mound, a little naked wen of dirt among the weeds, showed just in front of the planted hoofs.

"Your book tells the truth," he said, strangely cheerful. "Here is a tomb he will not cross."

"Get down, Wickett," commanded Jaeger. "Dress, and help dig."

I hurried to the gate, threw on my clothes anyhow, and returned. The chaplain was scraping with a shovel. Jaeger swung a mattock. I grabbed another spade and joined in.

As the first moment of gray dawn was upon us, we struck a coffin lid. Jaeger scraped earth from it. "Get back!" he grunted, and I did so; but not before he heaved up the lid with his mattock.

Inside lay the woman who had come to my cot, in her bridal dress.

"The stake," said the chaplain, and passed down a sharp stick like a picket-pin. I judged it was of hawthorn, cut from a hedge somewhere. "Strike to the heart," went on the chaplain, "while I strike at the throat."

He suited action to word, driving down the blade of his shovel. At the same moment Jaeger made a strong digging thrust with the stick. I heard again the bat-squeaking; and then, was made faint by a horrid stink of rottenness.

Jaeger slammed down the lid—I heard it fall—and scrambled out of the grave. He and the chaplain began tumbling clods into the hole.

Jaeger looked at me over his shoulder, haggard but triumphant.

"I give you back your parole," he panted. "Jump on that colt and clear out. To the west there'll be none of our troops. If you ever tell what was done here, nobody will believe you!"

I needed no second permission.

CHAPTER II

The Flying Horned One

I REMEMBERED that adventure, strangest moment of all my war-boyhood on a late night in the fall of 1876.

The wagon track I walked was frozen to rutted concrete. Wind as cold as fear rustled the tall dead grass and the naked twigs of roadside thickets. A round moon reminded me of a pancake, and I tried not to think of that or anything else to eat. It had been long since I had eaten.

The black beard prophesied me by a long-vanished Yankee captor hung thick on my jowls. I was gaunt, big-boned,

seam-faced. My clothes were torn, dirty, inadequate—overall pants, a frayed jumper, a hickory shirt that was little more than the traditional "button and frill," outworn cowhide brogans, no hat. I warmed my knuckly hands under my armpits, and blew out steamy breath.

A man, hungry and weary and unsheltered, might die tonight. I wondered, without much dread, if I were at the end of my sorry trail. Other Southern veterans had died, from sheer want, after surviving the heartbreak of war and defeat. In 1865, after becoming sergeant and finally lieutenant under Bedford Forrest, the general surrender on all hands had failed to include me. I had been detached somewhere, and had gone home. There was no home—Kilpatrick's cavalry had burned the place in '64, and I found only the graves of my mother and sister. They had died of sickness, as my father had died of a minie ball at Chattanooga. After that, the black "Reconstruction" period. I had been gambler, Ku Klux raider, jailbird, chicken thief, swamp trapper. And now a tramp.

Up ahead were lights, two houses fairly close together. I knew that I was near the Missouri-Arkansas border. A loosely joined community hereabouts was called Welcome Rock. Would those lights welcome me?

As I faced them, I saw the moon clear. Something winged slowly across it.

What I say seems unreal to you, as the sight then seemed unreal to me. That winged shape must have been larger than any creature that flies; I made certain of that later.

At the moment, I saw only how black it was, with a body and legs half-human, and great bat-wings through which the moon shone as through umbrella cloth.

I told myself sagely that hunger showed me a vision.

The thing flopped around and across the moon again. I saw its ball-shaped head, with curved horns. Then it swooped downward. Suddenly I heard the voices of men.

One laughed, another cursed. The third cried pitifully. From somewhere beyond me came strength, fury, decision. I ran heavily forward, my broken shoes heavy and clumsy. I saw the three at a distance. One was strung up by his hands to a tree's bare branch, the other two were flogging him with sticks.

I passed under other trees to approach. Their criss-cross of boughs shut away sight of whatever fluttered overhead. The captive's face showed white as curd, and the floggers seemed black. Running, I stooped and grabbed up a stone the size of my fist. When I straightened, I made out horns on the black skulls, horns like those of the flying thing. Somebody jeered: "You told on us. Now you beg us. But we—"

The two floggers were aware of me, and dropped their sticks.

"Knife," said one, and the other drew a blade from under his coat. I threw my stone, and it struck the knife-holder's black horned brow with a sound like an axe on wood. The knife dropped, and its owner sprawled upon it. I charged in after my rock.

The other man stood absolutely still. His outline could stand for a symbol of frightened surprise. He was mumbling words in an unknown tongue:

"Mirathe saepy Satonich yetmye—but it *won't work!*"

From the moonlit sky came a whickering, like a bad horse in terror. Then I was upon the mumbler.

We struggled and strove. His gabble of strange sounds had failed to do something or other. Now he saved his breath, and fought with more strength than mine. I found myself hugged and crushed in his long, hard arms, and remembered a country wrestling trick. I feigned limpness, and when he unconsciously slacked his grip, I slid down out of it. Catching him around

the knees, I threw him heavily. Then I fell with all my weight upon him, clutching at his throat.

Overhead the whickering rose shrill and shaky, and grew faint. The man I fought thrust my hands from his windpipe. I now saw that the blackness of his face, and the horns to either side, were a mask. He was wheezing, "If I get away quick, will that suit you?"

I tried to gouge his eye through a slit in the mask, but with a sudden effort he tore clear from me. Rising, he seized and dragged away the man my rock had struck down.

My strength and fury were ebbing, and I waited on one knee, watching the two flee among the brush. I glanced up. The flier was also gone.

The man who hung in bonds began to babble brokenly:

"You're free from cursing . . . free from cursing. . . ."

The knife dropped by one of the masked pair still lay on the frozen ground. I picked it up and went to the man. Cords were noosed over his thumbs, drawing him up to the branch so that his toes barely touched ground. The shirt was torn from his back, which showed a shocking mass of gore.

I cut him down, and he collapsed in my arms like a wet coat.

Then spoke a challenging voice I remembered from long ago, "What are you doing to him?"

I had breath left only to say: "Help!"

"I heard the noise of fighting, and came at once." A thick body approached in the half-light. "Bring him to my cabin."

I glanced upward, and the newcomer did likewise. "Oh, then you saw the Flying Horned One? He must have fled when I came."

"He fled before that," I said, for I had recovered a little wind. My words seemed to make the thick man start and stare, but he made no rejoinder. We got the poor flogged wretch between us and dragged him across a field to the nearest lighted house. The moon showed me a dwelling, small but well built of adzed logs, with the chinks plastered and whitewashed. On the threshold the man we helped was able to speak again:

"This is the preacher's place. I want baptism."

"I baptized you once before," growled the burly man from the other side of him. "Once is enough, even when you backslide."

"What he wants is doctoring, not baptizing," I put in. "His back's all cut to hash."

It was all of that. But the answer was still: "Baptize me."

We helped him in. "I don't think it will hurt you," said the burly one, and as we came into the light of a kerosene lamp I saw whose voice I remembered.

THIS was the Yankee Sergeant Jaeger, whom I had last seen nearly fifteen years before, spading dirt over a woman who had seemingly died twice. He wore rough country boots and pants, but a white shirt and a string tie. He set the poor fellow in a splint-bottomed chair, where I steadied him, then went to the kitchen and returned with his hand wet. He laid the wet hand on the rumpled hair.

"Peter, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son—"

At his touch the tortured form relaxed, the eyes seemed to close softly in slumber. Jaeger looked across at me.

"You're a stranger to the Welcome Rock country. Or are you?"

'A stranger here, but not to you," I replied. "I'm Cole Wickett, formerly with General Forrest—at your service, Sergeant."

His eyes fixed me. He tugged his beard,

which I saw had begun to thread through with gray. He opened his hard mouth twice before speaking.

"It is the same," he said then, more to himself than to me. "A strong weapon twice placed in the hands of the righteous."

The man we had saved sank almost out of the chair, and I caught him. But he was dead, and no wonder, for the beating had been terrific.

Jaeger laid him out on a strip of carpet, and caught a blanket from a cot to cover him.

"Poor Peter Dole," he muttered. "He backslid from one congregation without rebuke. When he tried backsliding from his new fellowship, it was his destruction."

I told what had happened outside in full. Jaeger did not seem particularly surprised about the bat-winged monster or the men with masks. He only said, "God grant that the baptism Peter asked for will bring him peace in the grave."

What is this mystery, Sergeant Jaeger?" I demanded.

He waved the title away. "I am done with war. I am the Reverend Mr. Jaeger now, a poor man of God, striving with adversaries worse than any your rebel army marshalled against me—Wickett, you make a dark hour bright."

"More mystery," I reminded him. "I want explanations."

He studied me, wisely and calculatingly. "If I'm not mistaken, you are hungrier now than when we met before. Wait."

He left me alone with the blanketed corpse of Peter Dole, and I heard him busy in the kitchen. He came back with a tin plate on which were cold biscuits, sardines from a tin, and some sort of preserves.

He also brought a cup, old Union army issue, filled with hot black coffee.

"Eat," he bade me, "while I enlighten you."

CHAPTER III

The Night Side of Preaching

"I REPEAT," began Jaeger, as I gobbled "that your second appearance to me is in the nature of an act of Providence. How could you meet my need so aptly twice, with years and a continent in which to be lost? Probabilities against it are millions to one. Yet you've come, Cole Wickett, and with your help I'll blunt the claws of demons."

I scalded my throat with the coffee. "You promised me the story," I reminded.

"It will be short. You remember the digging up of a grave. The woman you saw was not dead, nor alive. She was a vampire."

That word is better known now, but I appreciated its meaning with difficulty. Jaeger's voice grew sharp:

"You must believe me. You were close to a fearful fate, and to me you owe life and soul—when I defended you from that monster. Let me read from this book."

He took it from a shelf above the table that served him for desk. It was old and musty, with a faded title in German. "The work of the German, Dom Augustin Calmet," he explained, and read from the cover: "A Treatise on the Appearance of Spirits, Vampires, and so on. Written a century ago. And here," leafing through it, "is the reference you will need. I'll translate, though my German is rusty."

He cleared his throat and read: " 'They select a pure young lad, and mount him naked on a stallion colt that has never stumbled, and is coal-black with no white hair. The stallion is ridden in and out among the graves, and the grave which he will not cross, despite hard blows, is where the vampire is buried.' "

He closed the book. "You begin to see what service you rendered. That part of the country was plagued by what seemed

consumption or fever—strong people sickening and dying. Only I, and that wise chaplain, saw that their lives were sapped by a vampire. Other cases have occurred in this country—in Connecticut before the war, and in Rhode Island only two years ago. Men would have scoffed at our claim, and so we acted secretly."

I accepted the honesty, if not the accuracy, of his tale. "You speak," I said, "as if I am doing you a similar service."

"You can if you choose. I saw little of your struggle this night, but enough to know that enchantment cannot touch you."

My eyes were on the blanket-draped corpse as I said, "You think that one victory begets another."

"I do." He leaned forward eagerly, the old book in his hands. "You survived one peril of the unknown. Like one who survives a sickness, you have some immunity."

I let that hang, too. "You speak as if another combat of the sort is coming."

"Again you anticipate me. The combat has now begun—here in the Welcome Rock country, from which I thought to stamp all evil worship."

The story he then told me seems to be fairly well known, at least in that community, which once was called Fearful Rock. Leaving the Union army, he came there as a frontier preacher without pay. Vestiges of an ancient and evil influence clung around a ruined house, and stories about it caused settlers to stay away. After his efforts to exorcise the apparent malevolent spirit, several farmers homesteaded nearby, and the name of the district was changed. Recently, he and the men of his little congregation had built a church.

"That started things again," he said, and I must have looked my utter stupid amazement, for he smiled sadly.

"If you study the lore of demon-worship, as I have studied it, you would know that the deluded fools must have a church at which to aim their blasphemies. Look at the history of the defilers of the North Berwick Church in Scotland. Look at the story of the Salem witches in a minister's pasture."

"Those are only legends," I suggested, but he shook his head.

"They are true. And the truth is manifest here. I am being crusaded against. Stop and think—I defeated evil beings on their own dunghill. They were overthrown and chased out. But their black hearts, if they have hearts, yearn back to here. This place is their Unholy of Unholies."

"I see," I replied, wondering if I did. Then I glanced again at the blanket-covered thing on the carpet. Jaeger saw the direction of my glance.

"I'm coming to poor Peter Dole. It was last Sunday—five days ago. I came early to my little church. The lock was broken, the Bible tipped from the pulpit, various kinds of filth on the benches and in the aisles, and on the walls some charcoal writing. It is not fit to repeat to you, but I recognized the hand."

"Bad boys?"

"Bad men. I cleaned up the mess, and made a change in my text and sermon. I preached from Twelfth of Revelations, 'The devil is come unto you, having great wrath; for he knoweth that he hath but a short time.' I stressed the second clause of the observation."

" 'He hath but a short time'," I repeated.

"Yes. I spoke of the outrage, and said that the enemy gained no victory, but only shame. I read a little further into Revelations, the part where certain people are made to hide among rocks to escape the just wrath of heaven. Then I said that I knew who had written on the walls." He eyed my empty cup. "More coffee? No?"

I shook my head. He continued.

"Peter Dole came to me after the benediction. It was he whose writing I had recognized. Terrified, he confessed some things I had already made sure of—his

membership as a very humble figure in a coven."

I shook my head, to show that I did not know what a coven was.

"It's an old-country word. Scotch, maybe. It means a gathering of thirteen witches or wizards or devil-worshippers, twelve rank-and-file, and a chief devil. Maybe that's where we got the unluckiness of the number thirteen. Peter was of the twelve rank-and-file, and he pleaded for mercy. I referred him to the Lord, and asked who were his mates. He said he'd pray courage into himself to tell me. Tonight he must have been coming to see me. And his comrades beat him to death."

"One of his comrades has wings, then," I said.

JAEGER tugged his beard thoughtfully. "I have seen that shape against the full moon before this. Full moon-time is their meeting time, as with the underground cults of old Greece and Rome. The full moon makes wolves howl, and turns weak minds mad. I don't like the full moon. Anyway, that creature is the chief devil of which I spoke."

"Chief devil?" I repeated. "I thought that probably—"

"That probably some human leader dressed up for the part?" he finished for me. "Not here, at least. Hark!"

I, too, heard what his ear had caught—the flip-flop of great membranes, and the faraway chatter of strange inhuman jaws.

Then a knock at the door, sharp and furtive.

With shame I remember how I flinched and looked for a way out. Jaeger rose, flipped open a drawer in his work-table, and took out a big cap-and-ball revolver. He walked heavily toward the door.

Pausing with his hand on the knob, he spoke clearly:

"If you seek trouble, your search ends here. Too long have I borne with the ungodly, meekly turning my other cheek. Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord, I will repay."

He opened the door, took one look, and lowered his weapon. A girl came stumbling in.

She wore a dark dress of coarse wool,

very full-skirted and high-necked, with edging of white at throat and cuffs. Her brown hair was disarrayed, under a knitted shawl. Her face was cream-white, set with bright, scared eyes.

"Please," she said, out of breath, "they shouted that I'd find my father with you." She swallowed, and her lips quivered. "Badly hurt, they said."

"Sit down, Susan," bade Jaeger. "He is here, but no more in pain or terror."

She saw the body then, seemed to recognize it through the blanket. Sitting down, as Jaeger had told her, she grew one shade whiter, but calm.

"I will not cry," she promised us. "I would even be glad, if I thought the curse was gone from him—"

"Then be glad, Susan," rejoined Jaeger, "for he repented and died a believer."

He turned his gaze to me. "Now will be proven, or not proven, my thought that you have strength against wickedness. For the gates of hell are open, and our enemies close in about us."

The girl Susan and I both turned toward him. He continued, with an impatient note in his voice.

"How can mankind defend himself when he does not take thought? This is Satan's one night of the year, the wizard's Christmas."

CHAPTER IV

The Gathering of the Vultures

IN THE outer night rose again the whickering cry, that rose into a shrill yearning whine. Jaeger cocked his bearded head sidewise. "The flying horned one summons his faithful. This is their day, and midnight will be their hour. Shakespeare knew that, and passes the word on to us—'The time of night when Troy was set on fire.'"

I looked at a little old clock of dark wood, set on a bracket. "It is past eleven now. Have you time to tell me what you mean by the witches' Christmas?"

"Briefly, this: In ancient heathen times a festival of scorn was held, from which grew the Christian Hallowe'en—"

"But this is the middle of November!" I protested.

"Witches are simple folk. They reckon by full moons. We have one tonight, and they've crept out of their dens to do what mischief their hearts, and their demon, tells them. Beginning at my house."

He fixed his eyes on the girl. She had been sitting silent and tense, staring straight before her. "Susan," he said gently, "they sent you to find your father's body. Did they send you for any other purpose? If so—"

She rose, and lifted her hands. She spoke, slowly and questioningly, as though reciting an unfamiliar lesson:

"Mirathe saepy Satonich—"

I started and opened my mouth, to tell her where I had heard those words, earlier in the night. But Jaeger signed me to keep silent. Susan was not chanting understandably.

"Stand still, stand still! No more than a tree or a rock can you depart! This by the four elements, the seven unspoken numbers, the innumerable stars in the sky! This by the name of—of—"

Abruptly she sat down, as if utterly weary. "I can't!" she sobbed. "I can't say that name!"

Jaeger smiled, beautifully for all his broad shagginess, and stepped across to her side. He laid his hand on her head. "No decent person can, child," he comforted her softly. "They failed in the plot when they chose you for a tool."

She looked up, and faint color had come to her cheeks. Her eyes and lips had regained steadiness. She appeared to be wakened and calmed from a nightmare.

"I'll guess what happened," he went on. "Those who told you that your father was

here, also gave you a message to deliver. They spoke the words for you to repeat, making passes before your eyes—thus, eh?"

Slowly he drew his open hand through the air, as if stroking invisible fur. Susan nodded, and bit her lip.

"Several names for that," Jaeger commented to me over his shoulder. "Mesmerism, animal magnetism, hypnotism. Most occult dabblers know a little of it, would God they did not! But I had no fear of Susan, even when I saw that she was entranced. In the book of James Braid I read that nobody will do things when hypnotized that he would not do in his right mind; and, whatever her father's sad delusions, Susan is healthy and good."

Susan began to weep. "I would never have hurt you, Mr. Jaeger," she managed to protest.

"Certainly not." He touched her head again, comfortingly. "That spell was to make us both stand like posts, while the prowlers came in and did what they pleased with us.

Even had she said it in full, however, it would not work. It already failed on you, Wickett. For myself, I was silently saying the counter-charm, from this book."

He again produced a volume from his shelf, this time a sort of pamphlet in gray paper. On its cover was the title:

Pow-Wows, or Long Lost Friend

And, underneath, the picture of an owl. Jaeger flipped it open—I saw the page number, 69—and began to patter nimbly:

"Like unto the cup and the wine—may we be guarded in daytime and nightime—that no wild beast may tear us, no weapons wound us, no false tongues injure us—and no witchcraft or enchantment harm us. Amen."

I took it that such was the counter-spell he mentioned, and thought it odd that a minister should use such a device. But scant time for philosophy was left us. Outside voices began to laugh.

I say voices, not men. To this day I do not know just what sort of throats uttered that merriment. At the time it seemed to me that human beings were trying to sound like beasts, or beasts were trying to sound like human beings. The blending of beast and human was imperfect, and horrid to hear. Jaeger laid down the little book on the table, and again took up his revolver.

"Wickett," he said softly, "there is a window where you can watch the door. Take your post there. Watch. If they enter—and they probably will—stand still, as if the charm had worked. Because we can trap them so, as they meant to trap us."

He had no more time to prepare me, for outside there came a new chorus, this time of rhythmic recital:

"I strolled through a red forest, and in the red forest was a red church. In the red church stood a red altar, and upon the red altar lay a red knife."

A breathless moment of silence. Then a single booming voice, strangely accented, as if it echoed in a deformed mouth:

"Take the red knife and cut red bread!"

Jaeger sniffed. "Their sacrament ritual," he muttered. "A vile blasphemy. The window, Wickett."

He jerked his bearded chin toward an alcove by the door, and I moved into it. The window there looked upon the entrance from one side. Beneath the sill hung an old Chicopee saber, such as the Yankees once carried, and such as the Southern cavalry filched from enemy dead or captives. I started to draw it.

"No," Jaeger warned. "Only stay near, and seize it when they least expect. They will expect Susan to put out the light before they venture any nearer."

He bent toward the lamp, and blew strongly down its glass chimney. Its flame went out, and we were left in a sort of

bluish gloom. I could barely see Jaeger's thick body stiffen into a statue, and I imitated him, my eyes on the window.

"Move only when I do," cautioned Jaeger softly.

Outside rose more racket. Those who besieged us were plainly trying to put fire into their own hearts.

"Hola noa massa!" spoke the strange booming voice. And back came a chorus intonation:

"Janna, janna! Hoa, hoa! Sabbat, sabbat! Moloch, Lucifer, Asteroth!"

Those, I fancied, were the names of pagan gods and devils. As the last syllable died away, something came into view beyond the window glass.

With the house dark, the moon made sufficient pale radiance outside. It showed me what was approaching the door.

It was a black low shape, greened here and there as light struck it, like an expanse of old worn broadcloth. My first impression was of a monstrous flood of filthy liquid.

Then I saw that it was indeed a creeping creature, not more in solid bulk than a big man, but with outspread wings like ribbed blankets. It paused at the squared section of log that served for doorstep, and straightened up from its crouch. I could not have looked away for wealth or hope of salvation.

This was the same thing I had earlier seen flapping across the face of the moon. Now it stood upon two flat slabs of feet, like charred shingles. Its legs were long and lean, and seemed to bend backward, cricket fashion. The deep chest thrust forward prowlike—the breastbone must have been like a bird's, a protruding blade from which great muscles branched to employ those wings. For the batlike membranes would measure twenty feet and more from tip to tip, and hung from two long lumpy arms. The thing had hands, or what might resemble hands. From them sprouted the wingribs downward, and the gaunt, sharp fingers outward.

But of face I saw nothing for all the moonlight, only an owlish roundness of skull, and two curved horns that gleamed like polished jet, and narrow green eyes like the eyes of a meat-eating animal.

It started to lift a flat foot to the step, then paused. It bent, and I knew now that it had a mouth, for it blew upon Jaeger's lock, then whickered. The door opened slowly, as if pushed by invisible hands. The entity turned and moved away.

"Enter," it boomed to whatever companions lurked behind. "Do as you have been commanded, and do it well."

I froze to immobility in my alcove. A moment later, the horde outside made a concerted rush across the threshold. With them came the ugliest and rottenest of pale lights.

CHAPTER V

The Rout of the Witches

I KNEW an instant of terror more complete and sickening than any that had been mine in the war, a worse chill than at Murfreesboro, Selma or Shiloh itself. Then the terror departed from me, and left me almost serenely strong and confident. For those who came in were only men.

They were murderous men, perhaps. They possessed ugly powers—witness that light in which they seemed to be dipped, and the chivvying commands from that being called the Flying Horned One. They were men joined for a steadfast purpose of evil. They did not simply lack ideals, morals or character, but adhered to ideals, morals and character antithetic to all I honored. They had a belief, even a form of travestied worship, that claimed them as ever pure religion claimed saints or martyrs. They had come to execute horrors upon me.

But their master had stayed outside. These, his followers, were no more than men, and as such had but muscles with which to attack, vital organs in which to receive wounds. I asked no lesser opponents than such.

Jaeger had spoken of twelve members to the coven, under rule of the Flying Horned One. The death of Peter Dole, the pitiful renegade, would leave only eleven. I think that that many came in now, and the light seemed to burst from the uplifted hand of the tallest. But my second glance showed me that the hand was not his. It was a five-fingered candle or taper, fixed by the wristlike base upon a tin plate, and each of the fingers sprouted a kindled wick.

I had lost sight, though not thought, of Susan. She stood near Jaeger, and came forward. One of the throng whooped in laughter—his voice was muffled by his mask and thickened by alcohol—and confronted her.

"She did it, good girl! She bound them!" He turned upon the motionless form of Jaeger. "Why aren't you preaching, Parson? Walloping the pulpit and quoting chapter and verse? Pretty quiet and stiff, ain't you?"

He drew a straight dagger like the one drawn against me at the scene of the flogging.

"Take the red knife," he quoted unsteadily, "and cut red bread!"

"Wait," interposed the tall man who held the five-fingered light. "There's something to do first. There lies some dead clay under the blanket yonder. I'd guess it for what's left of Dirt Fire, known to men as Peter Dole."

Dirt Fire. Dirt Fire—I had heard somewhere of how witches, upon joining the circle, were baptized mockingly to new names. That had befallen Peter Dole, and he had asked for a second baptism to clear his soul of the horror he felt. The tall one passed his tin plate, with the light, to a pudgy figure who must have been a woman, masked and in men's rough riding clothes. Then he took a step toward Susan and towered over her.

"You've served us well," he spoke. "Our coven is one short. You will fill the emptiness."

There was no asking of her whether she wanted to. Perhaps some quick instruction by Jaeger had prepared her for this. In any case, she voiced neither acceptance nor refusal. She only faced the tall masked man, silently and gravely.

"Thirteen we shall be, counting our master," intoned the tall one. "Susan Dole, say after me the words I now repeat."

He lifted a hand, and made the stroking gesture in air that Jaeger had called "hypnotic." Susan drew herself up. The spell seemed to be catching hold of her on the instant.

Just then, Jaeger made a little twitching motion with the right hand that had hung quietly at its side. That hand held his revolver, unnoticed by the invaders. Fire spurted, powder exploded. The tall hypnotist seemed to somersault sidewise, and banged down on the floor to lie without a quiver.

I had been like a hound on leash all this while, forcing myself to wait for the cue of Jaeger's first move. Now, before the sharp echo of the revolver-shot died in that room, I had flung out my left hand and snatched the saber from its fastenings by the sill. My right hand brought it from the sheath with a loud rasp of metal. I gathered my legs under me and leaped at the man with the drawn dagger.

He knew I was coming, somehow or other. For he turned, trying to fend me off with that straight blade he had meant for Jaeger. My first axelike chop broke his steel close to the hilt. My second assault, a drawing slice, severed muscles, arteries and tendons at junction of neck and shoul-

der. Down he went at my knee, the gushing blood all black and shiny in that pallid light. I stepped across him, and into the melee that had sprung into being around Jaeger.

No less than myself, those invaders must have been keyed up to expectation of violence. When Jaeger's first shot felled their comrade, they threw themselves upon the sender of that shot. A big mask-wearer came in under the revolver muzzle, stood up under a terrific blow with the barrel, and grappled Jaeger. Others seized him by the arms, beard, throat, legs. They were pulling him down, as dogs pull down a bear. The pudgy one who held the five-fingered light stood apart, drawing another of those straight daggers. The look of the hand that held the dagger convinced me more than ever that here was a woman in men's garments.

Coming upon the press, I slid my saber-point into the back of the big fellow whose arms were around Jaeger. He subsided, coughing and struggling, and I cleared my weapon in time to face another who quitted his assault on Jaeger to leap at me. He tried to avoid my slash, and I smote his jaw with the curved guard that enclosed my knuckles. He sprawled upon a comrade, and both fell.

Then Jaeger, fighting partially free, fired two more shots. One of his attackers fell limply, and another flopped away, screaming and cursing by the names of gods I did not recognize.

The light-holder now gave tongue in a shrill warning:

"Betrayed, we're betrayed! Run! Get away!"

THOSE who could respond did so. Jaeger fired yet again, his fourth bullet. The last of those who fled was down, floundering awkwardly to crawl across the hewn log outside the door. Two of the others caught the squirming body and dragged it clear. We were suddenly alone.

"Don't close that door," said Jaeger from the dimness that fell again—for the five-fingered light had been knocked down and extinguished. "I doubt if we need to be fenced in from them." He was kindling his own kerosene lamp, that gave a healthier radiance. "Count the dead, Wickett."

I did so, noting that all wore coats or jackets turned inside out. Two had perished by my saber, two more by Jaeger's bullets, while a third whom he had shot, died even as I bent over him. The man I uppercutted with the saber-hilt was still alive and breathing heavily, but quite unconscious. I reckoned the one dragged away must be badly hurt, if not also dying.

"We killed or wounded seven," was my report. Jaeger had led Susan to one side, where she might not look. Then he went from one body to the other, pulling away their horned masks of dingy black cloth. At the sight of each face he grunted his recognition.

"All of them are my neighbors," he announced, "and all of them in my congregation, or pretending to be. Look Wickett! This one is a woman—she and that first man you sabered were husband and wife. I would have spared her had I known her sex. But here is one who seems to be awakening."

The single survivor sat up. He fingered his bruised chin, waggling it tenderly. His face, unmasked, looked long and sharp and vicious. His small, dark eyes burned as they fixed upon Susan.

"She tricked us," he accused, spitting blood.

"It was I who tricked you," corrected Jaeger. "Stand up, Splain. But make any sudden move, and I will fire one of the two bullets still in this revolver." He held it up significantly.

The captive stood up. Like the others, he wore his coat inside out. "My name

isn't Splain any more," he stated, with a show of defiance. "Now I'm called—"

"Spare us what foolish name your devil master gave you," interrupted Jaeger sharply. "I know most of that stupid ritual, that you think so frightening—another baptism, another book of prayer, another submission to mastery. I will call you Splain, and to that name you will answer, if you hope for mercy. Take off that coat, and put it on properly."

"You can't make me," flared Splain.

Jaeger pocketed the revolver, caught Splain by a shoulder, and shook him like a rug in a high wind. Splain squealed, cursed, and fumbled inside his coat. But Jaeger pinned his wrists, gave it a wrench, and a knife fell to the floor.

"I've seen this kind of knife before," I said, picking it up.

"Yes, several like it," agreed Jaeger. He had shaken the resistance out of Splain, had roughly dragged the reversed coat from him, and was now turning it back as it should go. "Get into this, Splain. . . . Yes, so. Clothing turned inside out was an invulnerability charm as long ago as the Egyptian Pharoahs, but it did not protect you. Wickett, I judge that it is a magic dagger, so-called, that you hold. Potent against all enemies that are not prepared."

"It looks home-made," I ventured, examining the weapon.

"Of course. Each wizard must make his own knife, hand-forging it of metal never before used. The blade is inscribed? In strange characters? I thought so."

WE PICKED up four other knives, including the one I had broken, from the floor. Jaeger gathered them on a table, also the plate with the extinguished five-fingered taper.

"A poor imitation," he said of this last object. "The hand of glory, cut from a hanged murderer's arm, is supposed to shed light and strike victims numb. Having no hanged murderer convenient, these made a dummy of wax. It failed against us as other charms have failed."

He smiled grimly at Splain. "Had the blades been simple and honest, your friends might have killed us. But they were enchanted—and useless. Get out, Splain."

"Out?" repeated the other stupidly.

"Yes. Seek that monster you call your lord, who thought a poor minister of God could not plan and fight a battle. Tell him that I prophesy his defeat. Six of the eleven he sent against us have died. The souls and bodies of the remainder are his responsibility. I shall require them at his hands. You obey?"

"Yes, Parson," grumbled Splain. He shambled toward the door.

Green fire suddenly played about him, like many little lightnings, or some display of fireworks. Splain shuddered, sagged, crumpled. He, too, was dead, the seventh to perish on the floor of Jaeger's front room.

Jaeger looked at him, at me. Then he whistled in his beard.

"So much for a defeated wizard," he commented pithily. "In some way the Flying Horned One knew of Splain's failure, and he has no use for failures."

He had produced his revolver once more. Flipping the cylinder clear, he drew the two charges remaining. Then he carefully loaded the gun afresh. From a box in the table drawer he took the bullets, pale and gleaming.

"Those look like silver," I said.

"They are silver. The sovereign weapon against wicked creatures which are more and less than human."

"You are going to shoot at the Flying Horned One?"

"No, Wickett," said the Reverend Mr. Jaeger, and put the weapon into my hand. "You are."

CHAPTER VI

The Five Silver Bullets

JAEGER'S talk about the influence called hypnotism came back to my mind later, when I found myself outside in the chill moonglow, the revolver in my right hand, moving with quick stealth toward a distant sound of mouthy misery.

Of me he had made a champion, in this frontier strife of angels good and bad. Reiterating his insistence that my share in that uncanny adventure after Shiloh had made me somewhat immune to evil magic, he had given me the revolver and sent me forth. Where? And to do what? My head was clearing now, as after too much drink. I began to ponder the recent events with something of disgusted wonder at my own readiness to mix into what was surely no business of mine.

After all, I was strange in this Welcome Rock country. I had had no idea of staying more than the night through. I had no practical interest in any quarrels there, even quarrels incited by demons. But from the first I had taken a hand—charging those who flogged Peter Dole, wielding a saber in the parson's parlor, and now stepping forth, gun in hand, to seek and battle the Flying Horned One.

I told myself that I was a fool. I entertained the thought of finding the through trail and tramping away from Welcome Rock. There were silver bullets in the gun. They might have some cash value to buy me breakfast, miles away—

The cries grew louder. They rose from beyond one of the leafless thickets that banded the country. From that point also came a musty glow of the green cold light. I heard a voice:

"No! We did our best! Don't!"

Something struck, hard and heavy. The voice broke away from the words into a scream of agony.

As at the flogging earlier that night, I quickened my pace to a run. I was fully prepared to meddle yet again.

Beyond two or three belts of trees I came in sight of a round cleared space. Away off to one side rose the dark pinnacle that once had been called Fearful Rock, in whose shadow had been done strange matters. I lurked inside the thicket, watching what happened in the open.

There were gathered my late adversaries, only four of them now. They were wailing, posturing and wriggling, as though blows fell upon them. But it was well away from them that the punishment was dealt. There stood the Flying Horned One, or perhaps he hovered—in any case his feet touched the ground, and his wings may have fluttered slightly to hold him erect. From him came the unpleasant light. He was striking again and again with a stick, at dark objects that lay limp on the ground.

"No! No!" the voices begged him. "Strike no more, master!"

He ceased the blows, and flourished the stick at them. "You have had enough?" he demanded, in that uncouth horselike voice of his.

They assured him, tearfully, that they had.

"Then obey. Go back and kill—"

"We have no powers, no powers!" cried the plump woman who had held the five-fingered candle.

Her misshapen ruler made an impatient fluttering gesture with his umbrella wings. "This, I think, is your coat," he said, and touched with the point of his stick one of the dark objects on the ground. I saw then that these objects were garments, cloaks or coats. The woman squealed and clasped her hands.

"Don't beat on me again!" she sobbed.

To my mind came one of the most familiar legends about witches, the one about hurting at a distance. The wax

image or portrait pierced with needles, the hair or nail-clipping burnt—yes, and the discarded garment beaten. I was seeing such a thing done.

"Abiam, dabiam, fabiam," babbled the monster over his stick. It was a conjuration of some sort, I guessed; indeed, Jaeger told me later that a similar spell is included in Albertus Magnus. "True you speak," he continued. "But you are bad servants." I saw his long green eyes glitter. "Perhaps I should discard you and get others. You who summoned me among you, step forward."

A fragile, oldish man came away from the others. His mask had been torn, probably in the fight, and his skin showed corpse-pale through the rent.

"I did according to the law and the books," he quavered. "If we have served you badly, it was because we did not know how to serve. Teach us."

The Flying Horned One put his arm-like upper limbs, that bore the wings, akimbo. The membranes drooped around him like an ugly living shawl. "You never asked if I wished to leave my own world," he charged fiercely. "You did not wait to think if I was happy there or not. You haled me in among strange things and thoughts. You talk about serving me, but you meant that I should serve you. Huh? Deny it if you will!"

They did not deny it. I gathered that he referred to some ceremony which had brought him into existence among them. Of such things, too, I had heard.

Again he addressed the thin oldster. "Do as you did when you summoned me."

There was a moment of scared silence. Then, "You mean the circle, master? And the pentacle?"

"You will be sorry if I command you twice," said the Flying Horned One.

The magic-maker hopped and fluttered like a frightened rabbit to obey. Stooping, with his dagger in hand, he traced on the ground a figure like a shallow-pointed star, about three yards across. As he did so he mumbled words, apparently one for each point. "Gaba," he said loud enough for me to hear, and again "Tetragrammaton." The other words I did not catch. Having finished the star, he traced a circle outside it. His comrades all moved back, but the winged monster hovered near, in some eagerness.

"Shall I say the rest?" quavered the circle-tracer.

"Not unless you wish to bring me a brother among you," replied the Flying Horned One, and it was plain that his hearers had no such wish. "Say only the first part."

There came forth a flood of gibberish, spoken by the old man with both forefingers uplifted. The others joined in briefly at the end, chanting as if at prayer. I saw the lines that the knife had marked suddenly grow more plain and hot-looking—the star was outlined as in rosy brightness, like a figure of heated wire; and the circle gleamed blue-green, like a tracing of phosphorus.

"Look!" commanded the winged master, in a voice that made my flesh change position on my bones. "Is it—"

"The door!" hoarsely finished the magician. "It is ready to be opened unto us."

"Yes," agreed the Flying Horned One. "Opened unto you. Speak on."

The magician fronted his glowing diagram. His words became spaced and cadenced, like verse from some ponderous tragedy:

"Fear is stronger than love!

"Serve those above with joy! Serve those below with terror!

"For those above, a sacrifice of one white sheep! For those below, a sacrifice of two black sheep!

"For those above, a sacrifice of one white slave! For those below, a sacrifice of two black slaves!"

"The door opens," the others intoned.

It was more like a wall, dark and gloom-clotted, that showed itself in the center of the star-circle diagram. From it rose, lazily, a thin little veil of vapor.

"Enough," decreed the Flying Horned One, and suddenly shot out his two upper talons to seize the shoulders of the magician.

I heard a thin choking squeal for mercy. The Flying Horned One lowered his wings about the man he had grasped, and I could only guess what happened to that man under their jagged shadow. It was sufficiently horrible, I make no doubt. Lifting the revolver, I fired my first shot.

It missed its mark, for I heard it strike a tree-trunk beyond. The three companions of the magician heard my shot and turned toward its sound. Not so the monster who ruled them, for he extended his wings and with a single beat of them rose into air. In all four of his talons he gripped the limp form of the magician. I am sure that I saw blood on that form—dark wetness, anyway. Two great flops carried the victim above the diagram and its inner opening. The talons let go, and the body fell into the hole, away from sight.

"Ohhh!" intoned the others, as if it were part of the ritual. Probably they were entranced, half delirious, unable to see their peril. Their lord flew back at and among them.

"In after him," he grunted, and seized two of them by their necks.

I fired a second shot, more carefully. It tore a hole through one of those wing membranes. For a moment I saw the tear, quite large and ragged, and moonlight through it. Then the Flying Horned One had dashed his two captives at the hole, one after the other. They vanished. I could swear that the hole gulped at and seized them, like a hungry, knowing mouth.

I came into the open, firing twice more. But my hand trembled, and both bullets went wide. This revolver, with which Jaeger had killed so coolly and capably at our earlier fight, was doing very little for me. Then I ran close. The Flying Horned One had seized the last of his worshippers, the fat woman, and twitched her in front of him as I fired a fifth time.

She caught my bullet, and whether it inflicted a slight or serious wound I cannot say. The Flying Horned One whinnied, and tossed her after the others. She, too, was vanished. I faced the dark winged silhouette, with not a dozen yards between us.

"You, too, have power," the inhuman voice addressed me levelly. "Power, but not wit. Do not use the weapon again, it is empty."

That much was truth. Jaeger had loaded it with five charges, the hammer being down on an empty chamber. I poised the gun to use as a club, and came slowly forward. The winged form moved to meet me.

"You have escaped," and the voice was scarcely more than a whisper. "Nothing that I said, or my slaves did, harmed you. Man, have you lived in more worlds than one, like me?"

I made no reply. I could think of none. Two talons reached out to clutch at me.

Then we struggled and fought. He tore at my face and at my chest, as though he would rend my flesh away. I struck with my fists and the clubbed revolver, but made no impression. His substance did not seem to have any true resistance, yet I knew that he had strength and weight.

"At my leisure, in another place—I will examine you," he told me, and heaved me toward the glowing diagram.

I grabbed him close to the elbow-joints, and we both fell heavily toward the black hole.

I struck the ground first, and there was a flash of fire, real or imaginary. Too, there was a little breathless shriek, out of the

dark face of my adversary. Suddenly all weight and grip was gone from me.

I set up. The diagram was no more than knife-edges in the moonlight. The hole—there was no hole any more, only hard earth. Of the Flying Horned One was nothing to be seen.

Jaeger, then had been right. Power to resist evil magic kept me safe. Endeavoring to carry me away, the Flying Horned One had fallen alone into the hole and had, so to speak, pulled the hole in after him.

Rising, I wondered if I should consider myself the victor.

CHAPTER VII

The Grave-Digging

THE morning sun was warm, invigoratingly so. Jaeger ahd I strove, with grubbing hoe and shovel, at earth that was no longer frozen to stony hardness.

"Make the grave wide, but not too shallow," he directed as he toiled. "Seven must go into it. I wonder if I can spare blankets enough to wrap them all."

"Will nobody ask questions?" I demanded. "Have they no friends or families?"

"Their friends and families will know that fate overtook them, but not in what form," replied Jaeger. "If no corpse shows above earth, I will not be required to explain anything. That is the way of the law hereabouts, and it is well. Wrestlings with demons do not court publicity."

I reflected that, after all, here was a wild and unwatched country. It was no more than four or five years since many more persons had been killed in Kansas by the Bender family, and the detection had come only by the slimmest of chances. Jaeger seemed confident that the matter was as good as closed."

"I shall read a prayer for them all," he took up the subject again. "God knows that few men have needed prayers more, but I do not despair of their souls. They were only misled, not wicked of their own wish."

I wiped my face on my sleeve. "Didn't they flog Peter Dole to death?" I reminded. "Didn't they come to kill us?" Didn't—"

"All at the bidding of the Flying Horned One. He had bound them in a spell. But he is gone, and I doubt if he ever comes again to Welcome Rock." Jaeger was speaking triumphantly. "His reception was calculated to daunt even a demon."

"Demon," I repeated. "Mr. Jaeger, tell me now, simply and shortly, what sort of a person a demon is?"

"No sort of person. For a demon is not born on Earth, nor does it die there. It comes from another place."

"From hell, yes."

"Perhaps from the place we think of as hell. What that place is like I cannot tell you, nor could any other man—not even if the Flying Horned One's betrayed servants returned to life. For we live and behave in but one sphere, with no conception of others. Yet, if another sphere could touch ours by accident or purpose, and beings come from it to us—"

He paused, and let the rest of the explanation grow in my own mind.

I considered the bizarre possibility. We of this life are two-legged things with blood in our veins, appetites to satisfy, hopes and duties to impel our actions. Basic concepts of nature as we know her make us all brothers. This is what we call the universe, this tiny handful of objects experienced through our few senses and imaginations.

But another universe, wherein not only beings and viewpoints and constructions are different, but the very elements of them—had that spawned the Flying Horned One?

Perhaps his very appearance, strange

though it seemed, was only his effort to conform with a new state of affairs. Perhaps his original impulses had been influenced by the worship paid him, and by the expectations of the worshippers. Perhaps he had thought of himself as neither good nor evil, but doing something which partook of neither quality. He might have been the least proper item by which to judge that stranger universe.

But I had no desire to visit such a place, or to encounter others of its creatures.

"Of morals to be drawn from our experience, there are perhaps a thousand," Jaeger resumed. "One, however, I shall build into a sermon. My text shall be, 'He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.'"

"From Ecclesiastes," I said.

"What I shall say is that a fascinating study can sometimes do more harm than good, especially to the careless. What hopes must that poor fellow have had, who drew a diagram and clumsily performed a ceremony he could not understand—thereby opening a trapdoor to another sphere and admitting the Flying Horned One to ours!"

"He went to the Flying Horned One's sphere, and his knowledge is painfully increased," I reminded.

"Can you say for certain to what sphere they went? Perhaps they have blundered into yet another manner of living, bringing strangeness and pain with them."

We had finished our digging. Jaeger looked toward the house.

"Smoke is coming up the chimney. Susan has made some sort of breakfast for us. After that, to bury the dead."

"And after that?" I prompted. "I am too tired to move on just yet."

Jaeger smiled.

"Why move on at all? There are empty acres here. Nobody will discourage a young man who wants to settle down, work, and rebuild his fortune. If you are lonely, notice that Susan Dole is beautiful and helpful."

But I had already noticed that.

"Come into My Parlor"....

Said the spider to the fly! The fly hesitated; but soon the temptation proved too much for him—and he was trapped!

And in your next issue of WEIRD TALES is a story of a horrible house that will lure you as the fly was lured!

What was the terrible, terrifying rustling which haunted that house? And why did naked Fear itself squat everywhere—in every corner?

Vile indeed was the secret that lorded over this house of monstrous growth and forbidden secrets . . . this—

SPIDER MANSION!

It's by FRITZ LIEBER—And It's One of His Best!

In Your September Number of WEIRD TALES

He insisted that the property belonged to him for Eternity. And he was probably right, at that. . . .

Lansing's Luxury

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

MR. CORNELIUS LANSING was a man of property, which he had acquired by methods singularly direct, if sometimes a little unscrupulous.

He was happily devoid of imagination, and that doubtless accounted for his lack of conscience. He was a man of notably benign appearance, with soft white hair, sparkling eyes, and a general air that made him seem pixilated. But he was not pixilated, not Cornelius Lans-

ing. Indeed, he knew very well what he was about. In all cases but one.

In view of Cornelius Lansing's accident, it was ironic that he should praise his own lack of imagination, for certainly this lack betrayed him to the rashness which brought about his accident—if it could be called that. Lansing led a happy existence, free from care, until he took it into his head to make a little more money. What quixotic impulse seized possession of him, no one could explain. He already had more money than he could use. Perhaps it was the lack of something to do which besets so many men moving into their sixties, so that they are taken with a sudden violent desire to do something, to accomplish something and so think themselves spry and able once more, and perhaps young again—though Cornelius Lansing could hardly have been accused of any such illusion.

Through his connections, Lansing learned that a railroad was to be put down from Cheltham, south of London, toward Aldershot, to connect with the London line there, thus effecting a short-cut vital to growing industries along the way. Forthwith Cornelius Lansing went out and bought up all the available land over which the road must pass. There was no reason why the small landowners should make a profit which rightfully belonged to a man with his finger on the pulse of world affairs, and particularly those affairs which had a tangible connection to the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street, as Lansing and his associates affectionately called the Bank of England.

Unfortunately for Cornelius Lansing's plans, there was one vital piece of land he could not acquire. His agent came back dour and certain that the crochety old man who held it would not sell at any price. "He's a sentimental old fool. Says something about the property belonging to him for eternity — that line. Money means nothing to him, the way he talks. The way he lives is something else again."

The lust for battle stirred in Cornelius Lansing like a primitive thing. He girded himself with a whiskey and soda and a glance at the financial page of the London *Times*, and said softly that he thought he would have a go at the old gaffer himself. "What's his name?"

"Queer one, it is. Elwyn Zamda. He lives alone."

He went down to the place next morning, and found it a quaint little house almost squarely in the mid-line of the proposed railroad. Since the news of the road was certain to be released within a few days, he knew that he must lose no time in acquiring the property. He went through the wooden gate and up the herb-lined path to the door, upon which he rapped with his heavy cane.

HE WAS kept waiting for an uncommonly long time before the door was opened to him; this was not calculated to put him into a pleasant mood, and Lansing made a mental reservation to offer less for the property than he had intended to offer. Less by a third, he thought; Zamda can learn that my time is valuable.

Elwyn Zamda gave him an immediate, instinctive feeling of distaste. He stood in the partly opened doorway, his myopic eyes peering out into the sunlight as if he were unaccustomed to it. Nevertheless, his eyes left a strange, rather startling after-effect. He made no suggestion that Lansing need come farther.

"Are you Mr. Zamda?" asked Lansing.

Zamda nodded.

"I want to offer you a thousand pounds for your property. That's a generous offer, and you'd better take it."

"I think you must be misinformed," said Zamda in a cracked, old voice. "The property isn't for sale."

"People like you annoy me," said Lans-

ing, with that singular directness which was his chief asset. "But before I let that get the best of me, you ought to know that I can have this property condemned through friends in the proper offices, and force the sale of it. I daresay you're a reasonable man, Mr. Zamda. My check is good anywhere in England."

"But not here," said Zamda casually. "Good day, Mr. Lansing."

The door closed. Cornelius Lansing was properly angry; he was insulted and determined upon avenging himself, to say nothing of further assuring his decent profit.

He went halfway back to London before he suddenly realized that he had not told Zamda his name. How had the old man known it? It was characteristic of Lansing that he could dismiss this little fact with the observation that Zamda was a queer one, all right. An imaginative man could have told him that Zamda was more than that; he was someone to be beware of.

But of course, Cornelius Lansing was a man who knew what he was about.

He lost no time in getting control of Zamda's property. There were ways in which to do it, ways of which Zamda knew nothing. So at least, Lansing thought.

ON THE day that condemnation proceedings were put through, Cornelius Lansing returned from his club to find Elwyn Zamda waiting for him. Aha! he's come to beg now, thought Lansing pleasantly. He walked into the drawing room and sat down importantly, his palms down upon his knees, his elbows up.

"Well, Mr. Zamda—and what can I do for you?"

Zamda did not look in any way perturbed. He finished his calm appraisal of Lansing's rich rooms before he met Lansing's eyes, scrutinizing him with a certain aloofness which might have alarmed an imaginative man. It served only to annoy Cornelius Lansing.

"My property," said Zamda quietly.

"Your one-time property," replied Lansing unctuously. "I believe my barristers bought it in this afternoon."

"Not all of it, no. A small part of it I shall lend you for a little while—for as long as you may need it," said Zamda.

Lansing stared at him.

"My servant, Mr. Lansing." Zamda gestured toward a chair beside him.

Lansing stared. The chair was empty.

"If you choose to exercise a little imagination, you might see him, Mr. Lansing," said Zamda with that annoyingly aloof manner.

"An imagination is a luxury to a man like me," said Lansing, getting up, since Zamda had risen also. "I warned you, Mr. Zamda. It doesn't pay to cross me, you know."

Zamda looked at him owlishly. "I think —I believe I said something to you, too, Mr. Lansing. But I may have forgotten. The property belongs to me for eternity. I was quite specific on that point to your agent in the first place, and I cannot help feeling it a mistake—a grave mistake—to trouble me farther. However—! In two weeks or thereabouts I'm sure this little interlude will be over and the matter of my property will have been settled without further inconvenience to me. I am a retiring soul." He paused on the threshold. "My servant, by the way, resembles me very closely—just in the event of your actually seeing him. Few people do. He's a little troublesome, but of course, in this case . . ." He gave a crackling laugh and left the house, peering myopically into the foggy afternoon.

Cornelius Lansing was properly indignant at what he considered a threat against him. He sent for his secretary and instructed her to telephone for a good con-

fidential inquiry agent to learn everything possible about Elwyn Zamda.

THE agent's report was not reassuring, but, of course, to a man like Lansing, with his lack of imagination, it meant little. In the first place, Zamda seemed ageless, literally: no one knew how old he was, except that he had always been there, he had always looked the same, and the old women who crossed themselves when his name was mentioned were convinced that he had come out of the caverns beneath an old ruined abbey in the neighborhood. (There were two old men who swore that Zamda had come out of the sea one dark, stormy night, but the weight of evidence was not with them.) He had no obvious means of living, but seemed to exist. In the second place, he had a very bad reputation. He was suspected of secretly practising wizardry. Indeed, there was a queer belief that Zamda could leave his body at will and travel wherever he liked invisibly! This was only one of them. His house, said a woman who cleaned for him, was filled with strange Latin books, and the vicar, who had seen them, shook his head blackly and said they were accursed texts which ought to be destroyed.

To Lansing, this was almost less than nothing. He was properly impatient with such a farrago of material, and dismissed it from his mind with a vague irritation at not having learned anything he could use.

It was not quite as easy to dismiss Elwyn Zamda because that night Lansing could have taken his oath that Zamda looked over his shoulder into the club mirror, grinning like a Cheshire cat. The impression was fleeting, however, and Lansing laid it to his salad. Five minutes later, he managed to save himself from falling in front of a heavily-laden lorry just by a hair. He was shaken, and he had good reason to be; someone had pushed him, and there was not the shadow of a doubt about that!

He reported the matter to the Metropolitan police and asked that a man be sent out to keep him company for a day or so, since a foiled attempt on his life might be repeated. Lansing knew very well that there were any number of people who might like to see something happen to him; that was the way of the world—envy from the world's failures. It was nothing more than that. Still, it was strange that no one had been seen behind him. "I felt the blow between my shoulders distinctly," he reported. "There was no mistake."

The police sent an officer out to take down an extended statement and spend twenty-four hours with Cornelius Lansing. During that same night, when he got up to get himself a glass of water, Lansing was tripped at the head of the stairs and fell part way down before he recovered his balance. Apart from a few bruises and a shaking up, he was unhurt. He was, however, furiously angry, despite the fact that his guard was on the spot before he had struggled back to his feet.

"I was tripped," he said. "It's your business to prevent such things! Where were you? Asleep, I'll warrant!"

"Certainly," replied the officer. "But I was out into the hall before anyone who might have tripped you could have got away."

"Do you suggest that I'm lying?"

"No, sir. It must have been your imagination!"

Lansing barked a short, sharp laugh. "You go back to your job, and tell your superior officer, with my compliments, you're a fool!"

"Very well, sir."

Cornelius Lansing was not a man to be trifled with. He left no stone unturned. He sent someone down to Zamda's house

to keep an eye on Zamda, but this was to no end, for a report reached him almost immediately that Zamda was apparently very ill, he was lying abed, and had only an old woman to care for him. This was "since yesterday."

It was typical of him that Cornelius Lansing did not notice the coincidence inherent in the occurrence of Zamda's illness on the same day on which the attempts on his own life were begun. He did not even remember that quaint superstition about Zamda's ability to project his astral self. He felt frustrated, feeling certain that somewhere walked a perfectly good goat to take the blame for these attempts.

At noon, the third attempt was made. He had occasion to take the train at Waterloo Station, and was saved from being run down only by the alertness of a porter, who saw him falling toward the tracks.

"I was pushed!" he maintained.

"There was no one near you but me, sir," said the porter.

He bit his lip and went to see his doctor, having sustained a slight bruise. To the doctor he told his story of the attempts which had been made upon his life; he told also that his suspicions had deliberately been deprecated by others.

"No one would try to kill you in Waterloo Station, Lansing," said the doctor.

Lansing stared at him. "I'm not asking for your opinion. I'm telling you, Medford!"

Medford looked at him with narrowed eyes. "I think you're working too hard, Lansing."

"Pah! I don't work enough."

"You need a rest in any case. Your imagination's getting the best of you."

Lansing banged his fist down upon the desk and told Medford indelicately and vehemently what he thought of people who did not take his word for the things which had happened to him.

"Imagination," said Medford calmly.

Lansing left in a black mood.

FOR the rest of the day he had peace. At dinner, he was beset with the curious desire to look over the report on Zamda once more. He got it out and sat reading it at the table. It baffled him. He could not imagine a man living so on a little piece of land hardly big enough to sustain an animal. But then, he told himself, Zamda was little more than an animal. Undernourished too, in all probability. His contempt for Elwyn Zamda superseded any other emotion he might have had.

Accident had dogged him for two days before he took a run out to what had been Zamda's property. The engineers for the railroad had made some excavations, and had attempted to break down a rocky ledge over which the line might run, and he wished to see for himself why it might not be feasible after all to cross Zamda's land, as the chief engineer had telephoned him.

Nothing but that one corner of the property had been touched so far, and Mr. Zamda—? He asked about him.

"They tell me he's sick," said the chief engineer casually. "Too bad, all this noise just now."

Lansing pursed his lips grimly, and walked out along the base of the rocky declivity which the engineers had been examining.

"I wouldn't go too far over that way, Mr. Lansing," warned the chief engineer. "Any little thing might start that rock pile rolling down, and there are some pretty large rocks there."

Lansing stood uncertainly, looking upward. "Just why don't you think we'll need to cross this property, eh?" he demanded.

"Well, we've found some curious caverns below ground; we can just as well go

around them as to take the unnecessary risk of laying track over them, when we can be pretty sure that a lot of heavy traffic will pass along this line."

Lansing snorted. "A man who doesn't take chances never gets anywhere. That holds good for a company, too."

The chief engineer gazed at him casually for a moment before he turned once more to study his plans.

Lansing went gingerly forward and then rounded a little bend out of sight of the men working. He found himself alone, with the steep slope of rock on one side of him, and a shorter, more dangerous declivity on the other. Elwyn Zamda's small house lay off a little to one side. He stood on the edge of what had once been Zamda's property. He chuckled.

As he contemplated with some satisfaction his superior methods and his victory over that stubborn old man, Zamda, his attention was caught by the sound of stones rolling. He looked up. Athwart the slope above him there grew a succession of little depressions, as of someone walking there. It was incredible! Mr. Lansing did not even have a salad he could blame this optical illusion upon, for certainly it must be that. Nothing without weight and matter could displace the stones and rocks. And yet there were more and more stones rolling and footprints mounting steadily, mounting toward the big rocks near the top of the rise. He stood gazing open-mouthed, fascinated by the preposterous thing happening before his eyes.

He was still standing as if transfixed when the rocks began to roll. At that moment he thought again of Zamda; he thought he saw him briefly there on top of the rise, looking down at him, shaking his head a little, gently, regretfully. Then he turned to run.

Unfortunately, Cornelius Lansing's success in life had left its greatest impression in his waist-line, and he could not run fast enough.

The rocks caught him in good time and mangled him quite thoroughly.

The men had not yet extricated Lansing when Elwyn Zamda, after three good days on his back, made his appearance in his garden and began gravely to water his herbs.

The Gun

BY FRANK GRUBER

A piece of junk . . . worth maybe fifteen dollars. But the soul of murder slept in its antique muzzle!

WITH one eye on the big clock John Parker shrunk down under the level of his high bookkeeper's desk and began to peel off his black sleeve guards. The task concluded he folded them together and surreptiflannel from the drawer and rubbed the light film of dust from his shoes.

He timed the work very nicely, so that when he straightened and again looked at the clock it was exactly one-half minute to twelve. It took thirty seconds to straighten

Through the haze of black smoke came a mocking laugh "I'll see you again!"

tiously slid open the desk drawer a few inches. He dropped the sleeve guards inside and took out a small whisk broom. Stooping again, he carefully brushed his trousers and finally got a piece of thick his books on the desk, so that when the bell rang he was able to step around the desk and move promptly toward the cloakroom.

And then he met the frowning eye of Mr. Wilton, the office manager. Mr. Wil-

ton kept his glance on John Parker for one moment, then raised his eyes deliberately to the wall clock. Mr. Wilton did not approve of clock watchers and although Parker was not beating the clock, he was a little too prompt in obeying its message.

The incident dulled Parker's enthusiasm. All morning, he had been looking forward to the lunch hour. He wasn't ordinarily a clock watcher, but today he had been planning something special and had wanted to take advantage of every minute of the sixty allotted for his lunch hour. He was even going to skip his lunch. And now the edge of it had been blunted. He wouldn't really enjoy the auction.

This was a good one, too. It had been advertised in the preceeding Sunday papers. John Parker loved auctions. A more or less indifferent bookkeeper in the offices of the Arthur Grain Company, he was one of the best auction bidders in the city. He could bid on a dozen offerings and never get stuck once. He had an instinct for it. Although he lived in a small furnished room, Parker would bid with genuine enthusiasm on a mahogany tallboy and at the exact moment when the price was about right, drop out of the bidding and let the competitor have the tallboy.

Take today. The effects of one Harrison Phillips were to be sold. John Parker knew what to expect. Massive old furniture, musty books, a mysterious ancient trunk or two and a miscellany of statuary monstrosities. Parker had about as much use for any of these objects as he would have had for a zebra, but he would bid enthusiastically on everything that was offered, during the brief forty-five minutes that he would attend the auction, and he wouldn't have to make a single purchase.

It was exactly six minutes after twelve when he entered the auction rooms and found them pleasantly filled with potential bidders. Parker liked competition.

He moved forward and found a seat in the first row which he promptly occupied. He looked up at the auctioneer, a tremendously fat man with a deep bass voice.

"I am offered two dollars and thirty cents," the auctioneer was saying. "Two dollars and thirty cents for this magnificent set of handforged andirons. Ladies and gentlemen, I could get more from a junk dealer. I could—"

"Two thirty-five," John Parker said.

"Two thirty-five," said the auctioneer. "A connoisseur has just entered the bidding, a gentlemen of the old school who knows real values. I am offered two thirty-five for these marvelous implements that are as good today as the day they were first forged and which cost the owner perhaps as much as seventy-five or eighty dollars. Two thirty-five; who'll offer five dollars?"

"Two and a half," called a man from the rear.

"Two-fifty, who'll give three dollars? Who'll give two-seventy-five?"

"I will," said John Parker and from that moment on remained quiet.

The auctioneer blustered and cajoled for two or three minutes and finally received an offer of two dollars and eighty-five cents and sold the andirons. He scowled down on John Parker, for the latter was not unknown to the auctioneer.

THE auctioneer's assistant brought up a beautiful statue of a nude woman holding a bunch of grapes over her head. It was solid marble and had undoubtedly graced a pedestal in the home of Harrison Phillips for at least fifty or sixty years.

The fat auctioneer scowled at the marble monstrosity and waved it away. He rummaged about on the long counter for a moment, then brought out a huge horse pistol.

"Gentlemen," he boomed. "I say, gentlemen, for this item will interest very few women, but it should delight the heart of

every man present, especially those of you who are collectors. Gentlemen, I offer for your pleasure one of the finest items in this entire valuable collection; a dragoon pistol in perfect condition. This beautiful old gun, gentlemen, was the major factor in the winning of the west. It may even have been in use during the late Civil War, although you would not think so, judging from its perfect condition. That is due to the fact that the late owner was a real collector and kept his treasures under glass, taking them out only to clean. Now, gentlemen, I am not going to insult your intelligence by asking you to start bidding with one dollar; I am not going to waste your time with such nonsense, because you know and I know, that this rare old dragoon pistol will sell for many times that. So who'll give fifty dollars?"

There was absolute silence in the audience and the auctioneer, clapped a fat hand to his forehead. "Gentlemen, gentlemen, why are you here? Because it's cold outside and it's raining? No, it can't be that, because the weather is beautiful and the sun is shining. Because you're tired and want to rest your feet? It must be that, because otherwise you would be clamoring to bid for this genuine—"

"One dollar!" said John Parker.

The auctioneer gave him a withering glance. "I'll pretend I did not hear that remark. I'll pretend that the gentleman was only trying to have a little clean, honest fun, because no one could be serious in offering one dollar for this beautiful, rare old treasure."

"Ten dollars!"

John Parker blinked and then jerked around in his chair. No legitimate bidder would jump from one to ten dollars, particularly not for an offering such as this.

He said: "Ten dollars and a quarter," then kept his gaze upon the audience in order to find the rash bidder. He had no trouble finding him, for the man was directly behind Parker and the moment the latter had made his offer, the other man snapped: "Twenty dollars!"

A murmur ran through the audience and even the auctioneer took a step forward on his platform and stared down at the rash bidder.

Parker himself, studied the man with great care. He wasn't a professional bidder, of course, but Parker was trying to size him up. He did not look like a prosperous individual if his clothing meant anything. He wore a rather tight fitting suit of broadcloth that had once been black but had a greenish tinge to it now, indicating age and much wear. He was a deep chested, hard-faced man with sandy hair, the latter long overdue for a haircut. He wore a battered black felt hat with a broader than usual brim. He looked like a farmer. In that case, he *might* have money, despite his appearance.

John Parker said: "Twenty-one dollars."

"Twenty-five," came the prompt bid from the other man.

John Parker turned again in his seat, smiling pleasantly, so the other could see there was no offense in the competitive bidding. Merely good sportsmanship. Something in the man's face startled Parker. The eyes. They were a pale, washed out blue; they were staring eyes—and cold.

"Twenty-six dollars," Parker said.

"Forty dollars!"

Parker cleared his throat. Of course the old gun wasn't worth one-half of that, but then Parker wasn't interested in the object of the bidding. He was attending this auction sale for the same reason that some men go to prize-fights and wrestling matches. Or ball games.

He said: "Forty-one dollars."

And at last he drew blood. The man behind him gasped hoarsely and his breathing came heavily. "Fifty dollars," he roared.

Parker turned and received such a look of malevolence that he winced and remained silent.

The auctioneer glanced at him and began to do his stuff. "Fifty dollars I am offered for this rare *objet d'art;* fifty dollars—"

Parker could not help himself; the sport was too deeply ingrained in him. He knew that the man behind him was determined to possess the dragoon pistol at all costs and it was not sporting to let him have it so easily. He would value it the more if he paid a decent price for it, if he got it only after a stiff fight.

Parker said: "Fifty-one dollars!"

The effect of this bid was startling. The man behind Parker leaped to his feet and uttered a cry of rage. "Damn you," he roared. "I haven't got any more money with me. Take the gun—take it and be sorry!"

And with that he stamped down the aisle, out of the auction rooms.

"—Going," said the auctioneer. "Going for fifty-one dollars." To the lucky gentleman with the celluloid collar.

JOHN PARKER recoiled. *He* was the lucky bidder. It so happened that this was the sixteenth of the month and only the day before he had received his semi-monthly salary—fifty-five dollars. It was all in his pocket, as he had missed his landlady the night before and had not yet paid his room rent.

But he didn't want the gun; he couldn't *afford* it if he did have a use for it. If he spent fifty-one dollars now he would be unable to pay his room rent. He would have nothing left for his meals during the next two weeks. He would—

"Here you are, sir," said the auctioneer, "You won after a mighty fine struggle and I congratulate you. Fifty-one dollars—"

John Parker stumbled forward and took the huge dragoon pistol. It was almost a foot long and weighed ten pounds or more. He shuddered and drew the money from his pocket.

Then he turned and walked out of the auction rooms. At the door he collided with a woman about to enter. She saw the object in his hand and squealed.

Parker sneered at her and stepped aside without an apology. He thrust the big weapon under his coat, pressing his left arm against it to hold it secure.

He walked several blocks up Dearborn before he realized that he was going in the wrong direction and cut west to LaSalle, where he turned south. As he crossed Monroe he noted by a clock in a store window, that it was two minutes after one. Damn, now he would catch it from Mr. Wilton, the office manager.

He continued a little further down La Salle then turned into a tall office building and rode up to the twelth floor. As he entered the offices of the Arthur Grain Company he saw that it was eight minutes after one by the time clock just inside the door.

He strode through the office toward the cloakroom. And there, just as he was about to enter, he encountered Mr. Wilton.

There was a gleam in the office manager's eye. "Ah, good evening, Mr. Parker," he said, sarcastically. "Did you have a pleasant lunch at the club? Did you engage in a little bridge, perhaps . . . ?"

John Parker reached under his coat and produced the big pistol. Holding it by the butt he laid the long barrel along the left temple of Mr. Wilton.

Mr. Wilton screamed and fell to the floor like a dead pigeon.

John Parker stared down at the unconscious form of the office manager. He was aware that there was excitement all around him, that his fellow workers were rushing about.

"Parker laid out Wilton!" someone cried in a tone of awe. And another:

"The worm turned; Jeez, Caspar Milquetoast conked the boss."

It was true, but to what an extent not even John Parker knew at that moment. He only knew that something had happened to him. It was as if an iron chain that had bound his conscience all of his life had suddenly snapped. He was free.

Wilton had persecuted him a thousand times and at last Parker had struck back. Savagely . . . yet he had no regrets.

He finally raised his head and looked around the circle of faces that ringed him. "He had it coming to him," he muttered.

"Yeah, sure," Doolin said. Doolin was the office bully. It was he who had put glue in Parker's inkwell. And now he looked into Parker's eyes and took a backward step.

Beyond the immediate circle a voice cried petulantly. "Here, here, what's going on? Are you people working here or are you just playing games?"

"J. B.," someone said and the office employees began to disperse, leaving John Parker to face J. B. Arthur, the head of the firm.

"Here, you," old J. B. snapped. "Get back to—what have you done to Wilton?" A gasp. "What's that in your hand—a gun?"

"Yeah," said Parker. "You want to make something of it?"

J. B. Aurthur's eyes threatened to pop from his head. "What's that? You dare to speak to *me* like that—?"

Parker smiled crookedly and advanced upon J. B. The president of the Arthur Grain Company was too astounded for a moment to even move, but when he saw the gun in Parker's hand come up he let out a shriek that could have been heard down on La Salle Street and whirling started for his private office in a headlong rush.

Deliberately, Parker brought up the ancient gun. He squeezed the trigger and was not surprised when the gun thundered and a pane of ground glass crashed in the door of old J. B.'s private office.

Arthur screamed again and diving into his office, headed for the lavatory. Gaining its comparative safety he locked himself inside.

But John Parker did not pursue. He was no longer interested in J. B. Arthur, or anyone connected with the Arthur Grain Company. He stuck the old revolver under his coat once more and sauntered out of the office.

Outside, he walked to Clark Street and caught a northbound street car. Fifteen minutes later he alighted at Lincoln Park and walked four blocks west and a half block south, finally turning into a dingy three-story brick building.

He entered a door and started to climb a worn flight of stairs. When he was halfway up a woman came out to the landing on the first floor and called to him:

"Oh, Mr. Parker, I just wanted to remind you. You forgot the rent."

Parker turned slowly. "I didn't forget it."

"Then you can give it to me now. Seven dollars for the half month, you know."

Parker said: Go to hell."

Mrs. Leonard, a stout, motherly-looking woman blinked and then gasped. "What did you say?"

Parker repeated the phrase then turned and continued climbing to the second floor. He walked down the long dark hall until he reached the last room on the left-hand side. He opened the door—it was never locked—and switched on the electric light, for it was so dark in the room a light was needed even in midafternoon.

A MAN was sitting in the creaking rocking-chair that stood next to Parker's bed. It was the man from the auction rooms, the unsuccessful bidder for the old dragoon pistol.

As Parker entered, the man rose from the chair and towered over Parker. He was no more than six feet tall and weighed perhaps a hundred and ninety pounds, but compared to Parker's five-seven and one hundred and forty pounds he was a veritable giant.

Yet Parker returned him look for look. "What the devil are you doing in my room?" Parker demanded.

"The gun," the other man said. "I want it."

"Then you should have outbid me."

"I didn't have any more money. But you don't want that gun. You haven't any use for it."

"I can sell it," Parker sneered. "It's evidently a rare specimen."

"No, it isn't. It's a plain, ordinary Navy Colt. They made thousands of them during the Civil War and this one is no better than hundreds that are still in existence. Any gun collector will sell you one just like it for twenty dollars."

"Then why did *you* bid fifty dollars for it?"

"Because it's my gun."

Parker glowered. "If it's your gun how'd it happen to get into the effects of Harrison Phillips?"

"His father acquired it some years ago. Harrison Phillips didn't know to whom it belonged originally. He kept it in a glass case all these years."

"Then why didn't you buy it from Phillips?"

"I couldn't. He wasn't the right type."

"And you think I am. Well, you're wrong. I'm not. I bought this gun fair and square and I'm going to keep it."

"It'll be the sorriest thing you've ever done. *I* know, believe me. You see, I was the same type."

John Parker took the gun from under his coat and hefted it in his hand. "I like the gun."

"Yes, I know. And you've already used it. Another inch to the right and you'd have killed J. B. Arthur. Next time you won't miss."

Parker's eyes became slits. "What do you know about J. B. Arthur?"

The other man shrugged. "I saw what you did. You laid out Wilton and then you took a potshot at Arthur. And now you're planning to take a shot at me."

The hair seemed to stand up on the back of Parker's neck. But there was no thought in his mind of backing down.

"Who the devil are you?"

"The original owner of that gun."

"You're crazy. You said yourself that Harrison Phillips' father had acquired this gun from the original owner. I happen to know that Harrison Phillips was over seventy when he died."

"That's right. His father got the gun in 1862."

Parker laughed harshly. "Now, I know you're crazy. You're not over thirty-eight or forty at the most."

A grim smile played over the big man's mouth. "I killed my first man—with that gun—in 1864—"

Parker hefted the big revolver once more, then suddenly pointed it at the other man. "All right, put 'em up. I'm going to call the wagon and have you taken back to that booby hatch from which you—hey—!"

Parker pressed the trigger and the room rocked to the deafening explosion. Through the haze of black smoke came a mocking laugh. "I'll see you again."

Parker was alone in the room.

He whirled and leaped to the door. A quick glance down the hall showed him that it was empty. He darted back into the room, circled the rocking-chair and sprang to the window. It was down tight—and locked.

There were no closets in the room, only a row of nails in the wall upon which hung Parker's meager supply of clothing.

"I'll be damned," Parker muttered. "Where'd he go?"

After a moment his eyes came to a focus on a patch of broken plaster behind the bed. He straddled the bed and examined the plaster. Yes, a bullet had gone in here. He'd completely missed the big man. Either that or the bullet had gone clean through him and embedded itself in the wall. But in that case, the man wouldn't have been able to make such a swift getaway. In fact, he couldn't have made a getaway anyhow. Yet he was gone. The smoke from the black powder had made a haze and he had seemingly disappeared into it; but he had been a little hazy before that. It was the reason Parker had fired.

Damn it. His eyes. There was something wrong with them. Parker rubbed them fiercely with his knuckles. It didn't seem to help any. Or hurt. He saw about the same as before.

He turned to the door but before he stepped out he heard the heavy tramp of many feet. Ah—!

He leaped out and thrust his gun down the hall. "Stand where you are!" he thundered.

The hall was full of bluecoats. They had guns in their hands.

"Take it easy, buddy," the leader of them declared. "The heat's been too much for you, but you don't want to get into no more serious trouble than you're in now. Put down that cannon—"

"Back," snarled Parker. "Get back or I'll blow the lot of you to hell."

"Don't shoot!" cried the policeman. "I'm sure Mr. Arthur won't press his complaint. We got our duty to do, but don't—"

Parker fired into the solid mass of blue. In the confined quarters he couldn't miss. The ancient Navy Colt made a tremendous noise as it went off. Police revolvers barked in reply and bullets splattered along the narrow hall. The aiming was very poor, however. The policemen were too demoralized. They were already trying to retreat and as Parker charged, firing into their midst, they broke completely and pitched down the staircase. One or two lost their footing and tripped the others and the lot of them went down in a solid pile. Except a couple who remained on the hall floor upstairs.

Parker followed to the stairwell and sent one final shot after them. Then the hammer clicked on an empty cartridge. With an oath, Parker drew back. He tried to snap out the cylinder and found that it was a stationary one. In fact, the revolver didn't use cartridges. It had a series of tiny nipples over which were fitted small copper caps. The loads were evidently forced into the chambers from the front. In short, it was a cap and ball pistol. And Parker, having used up all six loads, couldn't reload.

He swore roundly and retreated down the hall. There was a fire-escape at the rear of the building. He navigated it successfully, coming down to the ground in the backyard. He clambered over a wooden fence and scooted through a semi-dark hallway of a house and finally emerged upon another street.

By that time he had put the gun away under his coat and walked swiftly up the street. At the corner he turned east and found a drug store. Entering he went to the telephone at the rear of the store and consulted the classified phone directory. He found what he sought under "G" and nodded in satisfaction.

Twenty minutes later, John Parker stepped out of an elevator in a dingy building on Wells Street and proceeded toward a ground-glass door. He pushed it open and entered a gloomy gunsmith's shop. The walls were hung with scores of guns

of all shapes and sizes and in all stages of repair.

A fat, bald man with grimy hands got up from a work bench and came up behind a glass counter. "Yes, sir," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"I've a gun," Parker said. "I'd like you to look at it." He took it out from under his coat and extended it to the gunsmith. The latter took it and sniffed the muzzle.

"It's been fired lately."

Parker grunted. "I was doing some target practice with it."

The smith nodded and twirled the cylinder, then snapped the trigger. "It seems to work all right."

"Oh, yes, that wasn't what I wanted. I'm interested in getting an idea of the gun's value, that's all."

"Oh! Well, it's a Navy Colt. Probably the best revolver ever made by Samuel Colt. So good that almost every gun you find of its type is still in working condition."

"What's it worth?"

"That's the trouble. Colt made six hundred thousand of these and a good many thousand are still in existence. Maybe twelve-fifteen dollars."

"This one's worth more," growled Parker. "A good deal more."

"Not to me it isn't. I've got a half dozen in the shop now."

"As good as this one?"

"Every bit. I'll show you. . . ."

"But you can't shoot them. The bullets—"

The gunsmith smiled. "A good many gun fanciers still shoot these guns. I carry a supply of caps, balls and the old-time paper cartridges."

"Let's see them," Parker cried eagerly.

The gunsmith hesitated a moment, then shrugged and went to a shelf. He brought out three boxes of different sizes and putting them on the glass counter, picked up Parker's Navy Colt. He detached the small ramrod and used it to remove the used copper caps.

He replaced them with new from a box and then picked up a paper cartridge containing powder. He tore the paper with his teeth and poured powder into a chamber after which he wrapped a lead ball into a flannel patch and poked it down on top of the powder.

Parker watched the proceedings closely, but when the gunsmith had loaded three chambers he suddenly snatched the gun from his hands. "I can fill the rest myself. Now bring out your money!"

The gunsmith's mouth fell open in astonishment. "What-what?"

"You heard me; shell out. This is a hold-up."

"But—but I haven't got any money—"

"I'm going to count up to three," Parker said, ominously. "One—two—"

"I'll give it to you," cried the gunsmith. "Just a minute and I'll give you everything I've got." He scrambled to an old steel safe and began fumbling with the combination.

HE GOT it right after a couple of false attempts and swung open the door. His hand darted in, he whirled and came up with a very efficient looking automatic. "Now," he began.

That was the last word he ever spoke. The Navy Colt in Parker's fist thundered and the .36 caliber bullet whacked into the smith's head.

Parker sprang around the counter and swooped down upon the open safe, hurdling the dead body of the gunsmith. He reached into the safe and took out a tin-box. A chagrined exclamation escaped his lips for the box contained only three one-dollar bills.

He stuffed the money in a pocket and came around the counter once more. He picked up the three boxes containing caps, powder cartridges and leaden balls and

distributing them about his person left the gunsmith's shop.

At the elevator bank he pushed the down button. The light overhead showed white and the elevator door opened. A man stepped out and Parker took a backward step.

It was the big man who claimed ownership of the Navy Colt.

The elevator door clanged shut and the big man grinned wolfishly at Parker.

"Nice going," he said. "A couple more today and you'll equal my record at Centralia."

"Who are you?" Parker gasped hoarsely.

"Don't you know?"

"No, but I think—say, how'd you know what I just did?"

"The same way I knew about what you did at your office, then at your rooming house. I was watching you—"

"But you couldn't have!"

"Oh, but I could. And I'll be watching you right along. You're pretty good—with *my* gun."

Parker reached under his coat and gripped the butt of the revolver. The big man held up his hand. "Save your powder; I've a proposition to make to you."

"Talk fast," said Parker. "Talk fast, because I'm getting awfully fed up with you and—"

"Swell. I think you'll make a good partner. Now, listen, I've cased this layout and I think its a soft touch for two good men. We ought to get, mmm, thirty thousand."

"Dollars?"

"In good Federal notes. No Confederate stuff."

"Where is it?"

The big man laughed. "Is it a deal?"

"I'm keeping the gun."

"All right, keep it. I've got a six-shooter of my own. We may have to use our guns, but you're not afraid of that. They can't hang you any deader for one more. And you can do a lot of traveling with fifteen thousand dollars."

Fifteen, thought John Parker. Thirty thousand—and one extra bullet.

AT PRECISELY twelve noon of that day, John Parker had quailed under the frown of Wilton, the office manager of the Arthur Grain Company. Now, ten hours later, Parker was reading the evening edition of the morning newspaper. A headline screamed at him:

KILLER TERRORIZES CITY

And in smaller headlines:

Bookkeeper Runs Amok. Shoots At Employer, Kills One Policeman, Wounds Another and Murders Gunsmith. Most Dangerous Killer in Annals of Police History.

The big man, who said his name was Howard, touched John Parker's arm. "All right, we'd better get started. But I'm warning you, it's going to be close. If you haven't got the nerve—"

Parker tossed the newspaper out of the car window. "Let's go!"

He stepped on the starter and as the motor roared, shifted into low. It was a big, powerful car. Parker had picked it out on Michigan Boulevard. He shifted into second and zoomed up West Adams Street.

They crossed the river and turned left into Canal Street. Parker found a parking place by a fire hydrant and stopped the car. He locked the ignition and put the key in his pocket where he could get it quickly.

"Now, we'll see who's got the nerve," he said to his companion.

Both got out of the car and walked across the street to the huge railroad terminal. They entered and walked briskly up a ramp into the giant waiting room.

"Take a look around," suggested Howard. "We've got to head the right way

when we're finished and there are so many doors—"

"I know this place as well as my own room," Parker said and then wondered if he had really known his room at all. Howard had made a rather easy getaway from it that afternoon.

They approached the ticket windows, but when they reached them made a sharp right turn and went to a door, marked *private*. Howard rapped on the door with his knuckles.

Inside a voice called: "Yes?"

"Despatcher," Howard replied.

There was a moment's pause and then the door was opened a few inches, by a man in a blue uniform. Howard put a big hand on the man's chest and gave him a violent shove into the room. He followed himself, but Parker swarmed around him and whipping the big Navy Colt from under his coat laid it across the head of the railroad employee. The man went down to the floor without a sound.

At a ticket window on the right, the seller turned around casually. Howard waved a gun at him. "All right, Mister, come back here and open the safe."

"And make it snappy," Parker snarled.

The ticker seller trembled violently. "But I c-can't open the vault," he gasped. "It's—it's got a time lock on it."

Parker sent a bullet smashing into the floor at the ticket seller's feet. "The time lock better not be working," he said, "or *your* time's up. Come—!"

The trembling ticket seller hurried back toward the huge steel vault. He put his hand on the big dial and hesitated once more.

"I—I can't—"

"All right, Parker," said Howard.

John Parker stepped up behind the ticket seller and rapped him sharply over the head with the long barreled revolver, but not hard enough to knock him unconscious.

"I'll count three," he said. "One, two—"

"I'll open it!" screamed the ticket seller.

At the far end of the ticket seller's compartments a couple of men were scrambling under counters. A small revolver banged and a bullet richocheted off a desk near Parker. Howard answered the shot with one from his own gun and Parker, to hurry the man at the safe, raked the side of his face with the gunsight on the Navy Colt.

"Hurry!"

The terrified ticket seller spun the dial to the right and then to the left and again to the right. He gripped the wheel on the door, twisted it and pulled on the door. It came open.

Parker struck him again with the revolver and the man fell forward on his knees, into the vault. "The money," Parker ordered. "And damn quick."

Behind him a pitched battle seemed to be going on, but Parker paid no heed. He was leaving all that to Howard. Gunfire wasn't going to distract him from the main part of the job.

THE ticket seller, blood streaming from his head, was bringing out stacks of bills. Parker stuffed them into the side pockets of the light topcoat he had acquired earlier in the evening. They were satisfying packets of bills.

The ticket seller raised his hands. "That's all—"

"Fine," said Parker and shot him through the head. Then he turned and coolly stepped out of the vault.

"All right," said Howard. "Now, let's see how you are on the getaway. A job doesn't count unless you get away."

Parker ran to the door leading into the waiting room proper and whipped it open. A policeman was charging upon him, less than thirty feet away. Without breaking his stride, Parker sent a bullet at the police-

man and saw him pitch forward on his face.

Policemen seemed to be coming from all sides, then. Parker and Howard ran, firing to the right and left. Bullets whizzed about them and one raked Parker's left shoulder. It stung, but the pain wasn't much.

And then they were clear of the railroad station and running across the street to the parked car. A bluecoat was standing beside it, writing out a ticket.

Parker let him have a bullet, right in the stomach. As the man went down, he jerked open the door by the driver's seat and climbed in behind the wheel. He got out the ignition key, started the car and jerked it away from the curb. At that moment, the policeman lying in the street got out his service revolver and taking careful aim, fired.

A sudden roaring filled John Parker's ears. For a moment a red haze appeared before his eyes, then it vanished and he saw the huge concrete pillar directly before him. He knew that he ought to turn the wheel of the car, but couldn't. As if from a distance he heard the crash—

HOWARD said: "Are you ready to give me the gun?"

Parker knew that it was only a matter of seconds. "Take it!" he gasped.

Howard shook his head. "No, I can't take it. You've got to give it to me."

The gun was in John Parker's hand. But it was heavy—heavy. He tried to lift it and couldn't. He saw alarm come into Howard's face.

"I—I can't lift it—"

"You've got to," Howard cried. "It's sixty years. It's too long. You've got to give me the gun. Try. Try hard!"

Parker tried once more and blood gushed from his mouth. "Who—who are you?" he quavered.

"Don't you know?" Howard exclaimed. "I'm the original owner of that gun. I'm . . . Jesse James!"

"But you said your name was Howard."

"Of course. It's the name I always used. I couldn't go around telling people I was Jesse James, could I? A hundred Pinkerton men were looking for me, a thousand sheriffs, twenty thousand Federal soldiers. And none of them got me. No man ever got me as long as I had that gun on me. And then—then I put it down one day. I stepped up on a chair to straighten a picture and Bob Ford killed me. Shot me from behind, the dirty little coward. They wrote a song about it:

" 'The dirty little coward
Who shot Mr. Howard—' "

The roaring was in John Parker's ears again. He was slipping down—down.

"Jesse James," he said. "The gun of Jesse James. So that's why—"

"Of course, of course!" said Jesse James, impatiently. "The gun's cursed. Every man who owns it is cursed. That's why, I have to get it. I—I can't rest until I get the gun. Give it to me, Parker. Give it to me—and die!"

There was an ounce of strength still in John Parker's body. An ounce of strength and a grain of will power. He co-ordinated the two and brought up the Navy Colt.

"Take it!" he said, and died.

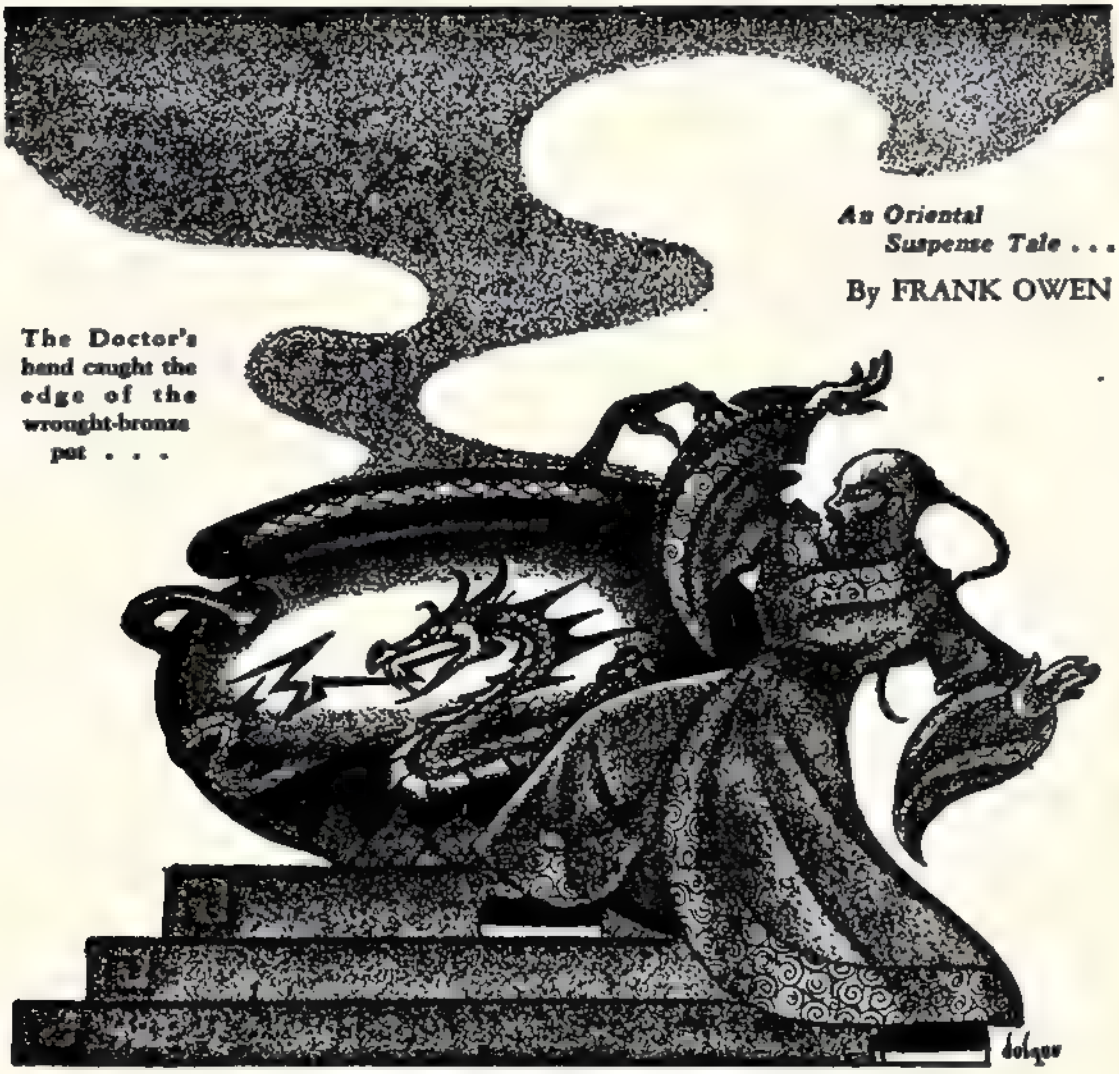
Statement by Amos Willoughby

"I knew he was batty when he started bidding for the gun. It was a piece of junk, worth maybe ten or twelve dollars as a museum piece. He said a dollar, then before I could say a word he raised the price to ten dollars. From then on he kept raising himself until he got up to fifty-one dollars, when I knocked the gun down to him. Can you imagine a guy bidding against himself? Sure, he was batty. Every time he made a dollar bid he squirmed around like he was looking at another bidder. And no one else made a bid against him!"

For Tomorrow We Die

An Oriental Suspense Tale . . .

By FRANK OWEN



The Doctor's hand caught the edge of the wrought-bronze pot . . .

A drug shop that has blossomed for a thousand years must naturally have solved many of Nature's mysteries. . . .

NOW when the meal was over, Dr. Shen Fu leaned back in his chair and sighed contentedly.

"Death," he mused, "the supreme adventure in life is seldom appreciated because man usually encounters it when he is in such bad health that he cannot enjoy it." His guests, Ah Chow, the porcelain monarch and Wong See Lo who had raised a few silk worms into a mighty industry, looked at him blandly and nodded their heads.

They were both somewhat sleepy. The meal had been a veritable poem in many verses, beginning with fragile cups of fragrant tea, candied walnuts, hemp seeds, small oranges, apricot kernels preserved in oil and dried, apples that melted like snow upon the tongue. Then the rhythm became more stalwart. Sea-slugs and sharks' fins, deer sinews and bamboo shoots. Birds' nest soup blending into a following rice soup. And so the poem continued until fifty verses had flowed with measured cadence into waiting stomachs.

Finally came warm wine to charm the senses and release the tongue.

Ah Chow and Wong See Lo prided themselves on their amiable expressions. Not the quivering of an eyelid betrayed their true thoughts. But they had no control whatever over their appetites. They wallowed in food, making snorting noises like pigs grunting contentedly. It pleased them that Dr. Shen Fu whom they had swindled many times and whom they imagined was their eternal enemy, should make this noble gesture in their honor. A feast in a house-boat, floating on West Lake, the jewel of Hangchow.

The day was pleasant. Occasionally a gentle breeze invaded the calm, cool and fresh and laden with the fragrance of peach blossoms.

Dr. Shen Fu lifted a cup of warm wine to his lips and sipped languidly. "Truly," he reflected, "the gods have given you a perfect day to set out on that gentle road that will end with your becoming immortals."

Ah Chow roused from his lethargy. "What are you saying?"

"That soon you will be an ancestor. You have unwittingly joined me in a death feast," Dr. Shen Fu explained softly. "What could be more enjoyable than a premeditated death, a death that has been cleverly appointed? My friends, we are dying in grandeur. Our appetites are appeased. We are at peace with life. Now for a moment we are resting, waiting for the doors to open to admit us into the vast hall of eternal mystery where our elders await us. Would you like more wine?"

Ah Chow whispered, "I do not like the name of death."

But Wong See Lo, despite his growing nervousness, laughed shortly.

"You are very droll," he declared. "I am not dying."

"One is never nearer death than when apparently enjoying abundant life." Dr. Shen Fu poured more tea into a cup as fragile as a rose petal. "My friends, you have entered into your last week on earth. I trust you will enjoy it well. A single week into which you must pack all that remains to you of living. Alas, that you both should have accumulated so much gold only to choke upon it in your final hour."

As Dr. Shen Fu finished speaking, he struck his hands together. Instantly two girls appeared from behind silken curtains in the stern of the boat. They were slender and graceful. One carried a lute. She sat down on a yellow silken pillow, playing softly, notes so sweet the lute seemed to be singing. And as she played, the other danced, soundlessly, rhythmically and there was music mingled with her form. Water-lilies crowded around the boat to listen.

The interval of dancing was but fleeting for soon the girls withdrew to appear no more. A servant brought long-stemmed pipes and tobacco.

"Come," said Dr. Shen Fu, "let us enjoy the fragrance of tobacco before we hang up our hats forever. Interesting, is it not, that as we recline in the bowl of life, we are so soon to peer over its mysterious edge? Perhaps we will be happier afterward for are we not always curious

about what lies on the other side of our neighbor's walls or on the back of the mirror moon of which no one has ever seen aught but the face it turns toward us?"

"I am disinterested in the quality of death," Ah Chow said hesitantly. "All my attention is focused on the color and the taste of life."

"Alas, that so little of the repast remains. Soon the mountains of the moon will spew forth their secret, if in eternity man may visualize all that encompasses the universe. You have been my guests at a feast. I am gratified that the viands were so well prepared, otherwise you would not have partaken of them so lavishly. But without your knowledge there was a condiment mixed with the food, which though tasteless, gave it a certain piquancy. That condiment was a subtle poison. Be not disturbed, however, even as it was tasteless, its effects will be without pain. As a final course at my table, I give you death."

WONG SEE LO made an effort to speak but no sound came from his dry lips. His yellow face blanched into a greenish ashen tinge.

"Be not disturbed, my friend," Dr. Shen Fu repeated. "You will be able to endure death far more easily than you have endured life. In death there will be no necessity for treachery. There will be no advantage to starve the throngs who work in your factories, for you will have no factories."

"But I do not want to die," Wong See Lo declared firmly. "Death may have all the attraction you claim for it, but I am in no hurry. I am content to jog slowly along the road of life without any unnecessary impulse."

Said Ah Chow, "I shun death with the same fervor I would shun a morbid disease."

"You are guilty of wrong thinking," Shen Fu told him. "Being a doctor of medicine I can assure you it is life that is the disease; death is the cure."

Sudden panic seized Ah Chow. "My fingers are growing cold!"

"The fruit of distorted imagination," commented Dr. Shen Fu.

"My feet are numb!" broke in Wong See Lo.

Dr. Shen Fu sighed. "Why not attempt to live your last hours gracefully?"

"Is there nothing we can do?" Ah Chow pleaded. "Must we sit here and do nothing?"

"Nothing?" reflected Dr. Shen Fu. "Nothing? Truly a strange term to use when you are dying. How, then, could you be more gainfully employed?"

Dr. Shen Fu gazed at his guests through half-closed eyes, as though they were beetles in some weird experiment. It was interesting to watch their reactions. Now perhaps the feast was salted with regret. Too late they realized that they were unwise when they perpetrated frauds on the eminent doctor.

"Death is the only exalted place we attain without effort," he mused. "It is man's supreme destiny. Why toil?"

"Would that I were a begger," said Ah Chow. "Then this would not have happened to me."

"Wisdom flows from your lips; truly no begger ever partakes of such a feast."

"Hunger is a blessing," sighed Ah Chow. "How I wish I could enjoy it at this moment."

"When the stomach is full," observed Dr. Shen Fu, "it is easy to be a philosopher."

2.

Although Wong See Lo did not want to die, he fretted over the weary hours that he must endure ere death caught up with

him. In the late evening, after daylight had expired, he put on a long blue silken gown, embroidered with jade and coral beads, and felt-soled shoes that he had never before worn. Then out into the garden he walked. The night was tremulous with stars. The trees murmured gently. A yellow moon hung low. He breathed deeply of the cool fragrant air. He had already ordered a bamboo chair to be placed in the garden for his comfort. Now he took the chair and carried it to a pear tree. He climbed upon the chair. From his sleeve he drew a heavy red-silk cord. He fastened it around his neck, then he tied the ends of it to a strong branch. His hands did not tremble. No longer was he afraid. Without hesitation, he kicked the bamboo chair from beneath his feet. And there he dangled from the pear tree, while the moon glowed yellow and the trees murmured songs to the cool night wind. There was peace in the garden, peace and music, while Wong See Lo, the silk merchant, quietly danced in the air.

3.

BUT Ah Chow was made of firmer stuff. Not so easily would he submit to the amazing dictates of Dr. Shen Fu. In business he had always been known as a shrewd trader. If he must eventually forfeit his life, he must secure full value for it.

He would not join his ancestors in the knowledge that he had been bested in his last trade on earth. So instead of weeping and beating his breast, he returned on the morrow to the drug shop of Dr. Shen Fu. Ever since the golden days of the T'ang Dynasty it had been in the family of Shen and so it was known as "The Drug Shop of a Thousand Years."

The venerable Doctor greeted Ah Chow graciously. Nothing in his manner reflected his innermost thoughts—that a living specimen was returning to the laboratory for further experimentation.

His words were humble, "My shop is honored by your presence." Not by as much as the flickering of an eyelid did he acknowledge that he was surprised at the visit.

"I have come to you," Ah Chow said, "to discuss various means of prolonging life. In all China, no sage is more profound, no doctor more deeply versed in alchemy."

There was honey in the words of Ah Chow, the porcelain monarch, but in his eyes were sharp swords. Dr. Shen Fu smiled but he was in no way deceived by the words that the eyes contradicted.

"You mean 'The Golden Pill of Immortality?' "

"You are acquainted with it?" Ah Chow fought a losing battle to suppress his eagerness.

"A drug shop that has blossomed for a thousand years must naturally have solved many of nature's mysteries. Still it is a question whether Immortality for man would be a blessing or a curse. How then could one join one's ancestors and thereby take his true place in the spiritual universe?"

"I am in no hurry to acquire so great an honor. Besides, I am very rich. I can pay well for any service you are able to render me."

"I have already been of service to you," mused Dr. Shen Fu. "You are dying gently and without pain."

Ah Chow decided that he had adopted the wrong course of procedure. It is only by a circuitous route that man attains fulfillment of his wishes.

He decided that he would wait for Dr. Shen Fu to unravel the skein of conversation.

"A thousand years ago," began the Doctor meditatively, "when one of my honored ancestors first opened this drug shop,

there came to it frequently a learned man named Lu-yien who was a scholar, a magistrate and an alchemist whose fame has survived in the voluminous manuscripts he has given unto the world. For myself, I would not be worthy of the term drug-merchant had I not committed his works to memory. His grass characters are the very life-blood of alchemy. Thus does he write: 'Would you seek the golden elixir, it is not easy to obtain. The three powers, sun, moon, and stars, must seven times repeat their footsteps; and the four seasons nine times complete their circuit. You must wash it white and burn it red; when one draught will give you ten thousand ages, and you will be wafted beyond the sphere of sublunary things. Everybody seeks long life, but the secret is not easy to find. If you covet the precious things of heaven, you must reject the treasures of earth.' "

Dr. Shen Fu stopped quoting abruptly. "Shall we have some tea?" he asked.

"Tea? Tea?" cried Ah Chow angrily. "This is no time for tea!"

"There is always time for a cup of liquid jade."

"But the elixir! The elixir!"

"It is not for those who gloat over the treasures of earth."

"But I will renounce wealth!"

"It would be more seeming for you to renounce life. Be tranquil. Think of the precepts of the Old Philosopher, 'Life follows upon death. Death is the beginning of life. If, then, life and death are but consecutive states, what need have you to complain?' "

"I am rich," burst out Ah Chow. "I have jades and pearls that an Emperor might cherish, and all will be yours for a Golden Pill of Immortality!"

"When a man owns the sky it is easy to give away stars."

"I fail to understand your meaning."

"Nothing is more involved than simplicity. However, this is no time to indulge in intricately embroidered sentences. When a man knows he is to die it is amazing how much he can accomplish in a short time. He is frugal even with words. Lao Tzu has written indelibly on the minds of our people, 'Govern a country as you would cook a small fish.' Alas, I am not an Emperor, so I cannot govern a country, but I can teach you much about cooking a small fish."

"Fish!" cried Ah Chow in anguish. "What care I for fish when I am dying?"

"They are very nutritious," said Dr. Shen Fu blandly, "but more important to you, is the fact that I shall use a few small fish in an experiment with the Immortal Elixir."

"You would waste that which is a thousand times more precious than jade upon fish!"

"For the advancement of alchemy. I would have you view their reactions under intense heat. Let us go into the garden."

4.

IN THE garden of the drug shop, a fire had already been lighted under a wrought bronze pot, a pot so huge that it might have contained rice for all the poor of the province. But it was not food that was cooked in its enormous interior but broths to alleviate pain. In one corner of the spacious grounds a herd of deer was fenced off, for the deer supplies many remedies for the pharmacopeia of China. Its skin, horns, bones, hoof and viscera are used.

Dr. Shen Fu led the way to the bronze pot. A fire had already been kindled under it. They mounted a few steps to a platform from which they could get a good view of the interior.

"It is filled with boiling oil," said the Doctor, "to be used in our experiment."

A servant came forward carrying a por-

celain bowl containing six small fishes.

From his sleeve, Dr. Shen Fu drew a cinnabar snuff box. Carefully he extracted a minute pill which he placed in the mouth of one of the fishes. Immediately thereafter he tossed it into the bubbling, scalding oil. He did the same with a second and a third fish but the remaining three fishes, he threw into the sputtering fat without imbueing them with the golden elixir.

"Now look at the result," he ordered.

Ah Chow peered eagerly into the seething cauldron. The three fishes that had been given "The Golden Pills of Immortality" were swimming about as though they were in cold water, but the other three were cooked to a crisp and might have been tasty morsels to eat.

"The Taoist, Kan-shi," said the Doctor, "was the first to perfect this experiment. He lived many cycles ago and his exploits have all been metriculously recorded by the renowned grassist, Kohung. He experimented with silk-worms in like manner. After ten months they were still alive and may be still alive for all I know. It was given to chickens and small dogs and they stopped growing. A white dog on taking it turned black, proving that many things of heaven and earth are beyond understanding."

Ah Chow had been paying no attention to the Doctor's words but he was thinking quickly. A great anger flamed up in his heart and spread through his body with the speed of a flash of lightning. Dr. Shen Fu had wasted the elixir on fish when he was willing to pay a fortune for it.

"Look! Look!" he cried suddenly, "I think the other fishes are burning to a crisp."

As Dr. Shen Fu leaned forward eagerly, Ah Chow pushed him with a cornered tiger's strength and toppled him into the fat.

The Doctor made no cry as he fell, but he threw out his hand and caught the edge of the wrought-bronze pot. Immediately their was a hissing, sputtering sound, clouds of blue smoke rose from the pot. When it cleared, there was no sign of the doctor, neither was there the slightest vestige of his clothes. But the hand still grasped the edge of the pot, a dismembered hand that was all the evidence that a murder had been committed. Quickly Ah Chow released the grip of the fingers, though it required considerable effort, and because he did not know what to do with the tell-tale hand he hid it in his sleeve. Even though to escape from that horror garden, he had to pass through the drug shop where numerous clerks were measuring out fantastic medicines such as powdered toad skins for dropsy, infant's brain salve for skin diseases and dried water buffalo hide for carbuncle, they were so absorbed in their work none of them paid the slightest attention to him.

Outside the shop, he breathed more easily. He hired a rickshaw so that the short trip to his own elaborate home might be made more quickly. It may only have been the result of his overwrought nerves but he had the ghastly feeling that the severed hand was clutching him so that it would not fall from his sleeve. What a fool he had been to give way to anger! A merchant who succumbs to anger is like unto a man who would rob his own house. Better had he followed the example of Wong See Lo and dangled on the end of a red cord from a pear tree. Still there was some little satisfaction in knowing that the great Dr. Shen Fu had preceded him to the Yang. He wished the hand would not grip him so tightly and why was it still warm? What force kept heat in those fingers that should have been cold in death?

Ah Chow shuddered. A chill was upon him as though it were four-coat weather.

It was a relief to him when he was

once more within the guarded confines of his own home. There were plenty of servants, strong northern hillsmen who would have wrestled dragons at his command. They were stalwart and fearless, men to whom a good fight was a tonic. That they were lazy as well, did not detract from their efficiency as bodyguards. They were above doing menial things which they left for lesser men. Nevertheless, Ah Chow felt repaid when occasionally they ejected a too ardent visitor from the tranquil gardens.

Ah Chow had accumulated vast wealth, nor cared he about the price he had to pay for it. He had a generous supply of enemies. But now one of them, Dr. Shen Fu, was dead—all but his hand. The living hand was a nuisance. He couldn't bury it in his garden and defile the earth. Besides, the hand was not dead. This was not, however, the real reason he decided to keep it, to hide it away in a teakwood chest in his sleeping room. There was a force that directed his mind, a force greater than curiosity, though that was considerable.

He wondered how long it would take for the hand to die. He tried to banish from his mind the knowledge that to dispose of that hand was an impossible thing. He could still feel the steel-trap grip of those fingers biting into the flesh of his arm as he had carried it home in his sleeve.

5.

THAT night as he sat alone at his evening meal, he had no appetite. The tea had a bitter taste. His mouth balked at accepting food even though his stomach growled for sustenance. Like a fool he had plunged into peril that he might have avoided. How now could he enjoy the last few days that remained to him of life? He fretted because the poison was not acting quickly enough. He who had been afraid to die was now afraid to live even though it was but for a few more days.

He retired early. For hours he lay and tossed on his kong, sleeping in snatches. Every once in a while he listened as though to the echo of words gently spoken. Cold sweat broke out on his forehead. What if it were the voice of Dr. Shen Fu? Ridiculous. The Doctor was dead, all but his hand and a hand cannot talk. He rose and walked to the window. In the moonlight the garden was a lovesome place. The sky was so clear the stars gazed down like startled eyes. The air was sweetened by the breath of countless flowers. Lovely was the night. The breeze was cool, the trees murmured eloquently. There was enchantment in that garden but nothing of fear. A child might have lain in the perfumed darkness wooed to sleep by the lullaby of trees. He was a fool, Ah Chow whom all called the porcelain monarch! Hundreds of workers toiled in his shops. All looked up to him. And now he was afraid.

He returned resolutely to his kong. This time reason reasserted itself. He was able to sleep. How long he slept he did not know, but suddenly he awakened. He tried to cry out but no sound came from his lips other than that which might have been attributed to a green frog sobbing. Had the moon exploded? Was there no air to breathe? He gasped for breath, something was choking him. The fingers of a hand were about his throat. The fingers bit into his flesh like hungry mouths. And then it was that he knew, knew that the hand of Dr. Shen Fu was clutching at his life. The blood in his veins congealed, his body became rigid, cold. No longer was his face a healthy yellow. It took on a tinge of blue that blended into green as the yellow moonbeams fell upon it. All power had left him, he couldn't struggle, he couldn't cry out, he couldn't breathe but his bulging eyes had doubly-acute sight. And then it was that he made out

the features of Dr. Shen Fu smiling down upon him.

"I have come back for my hand," he said gently, "but I cannot release it from your throat. Therefore I shall walk about the marble paths of your garden and enjoy the wonder of the night until I can reclaim it without effort. What a pity that you could not have met the supreme adventure gracefully?"

So saying, Dr. Shen Fu walked slowly out into the garden. With measured footsteps he walked to the music of the trees under a sky tremulous with stars. He knew that it would not be long before his hand had completed its task.

"Ah Chow," he reflected, "was a shrewd trader, but not shrewd enough. He had neglected to reason that it would be hard, very hard to kill an alchemist who was able to successfully manufacture 'The Golden Pill of Immortality.' "

Moonlight

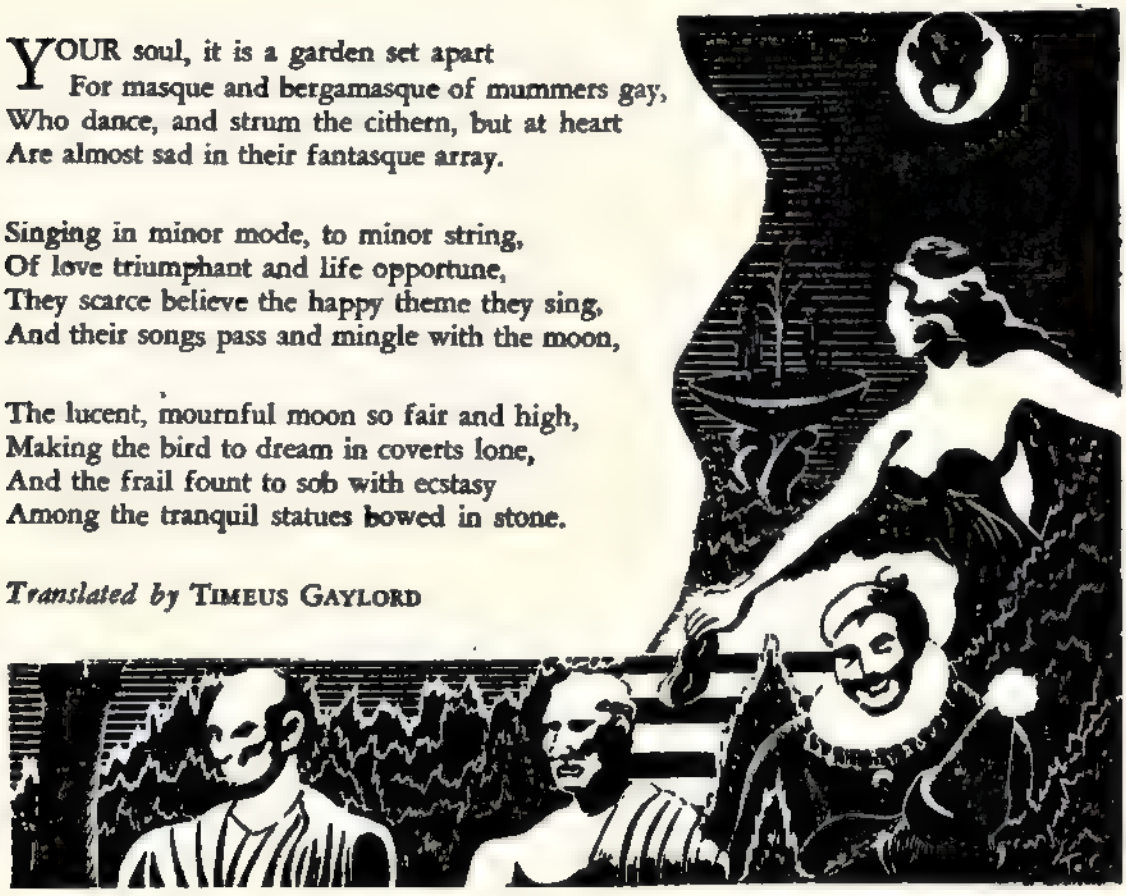
(*From the French of Paul Verlaine*)

YOUR soul, it is a garden set apart
For masque and bergamasque of mummers gay,
Who dance, and strum the cithern, but at heart
Are almost sad in their fantasque array.

Singing in minor mode, to minor string,
Of love triumphant and life opportune,
They scarce believe the happy theme they sing,
And their songs pass and mingle with the moon,

The lucent, mournful moon so fair and high,
Making the bird to dream in coverts lone,
And the frail fount to sob with ecstasy
Among the tranquil statues bowed in stone.

Translated by TIMEUS GAYLORD



It will grip you and it won't let you go; it will become unbearable, a torture to listen to— for it will be . . .

Dead Silence

By LEONARD LEE CHARLOT

MORAN, the third of us, broke in excitedly with, "You mean you are going to seek *proof* for your theory? Actual proof?"

The Professor, who is no amateur when it comes to histrionics, nodded and waited for the effect of his statement to set in.

I was as incredulous as Moran. "The *sound* of death, Professor? Preposterous!"

"Ridiculous," echoed Moran.

"You're joking, Draxton," I said, finally.

"And may I remind you," Moran joined, "that it is no joking matter."

Draxton shrugged his lean shoulders and ran a thin, steady finger over his pallid cheek. He was obviously amused at our exasperation with him. As Professor Emeritus of Music at Marion College, where Moran and I were under-professors in the same department, he commanded a good deal of respect. Travels all over the world had given him the reputation as perhaps the most renowned authority on the subject of primitive music. His theories were often a little queer, but he stuck to his guns despite the opposition he received from those around him.

"Every emotional experience of the human organism has a musical counterpart," he said. Nobody disagreed with him on that point. For the Professor had amassed an amazing collection of data to prove his point. In his travels among primitive peoples he picked up literally hundreds of weird and uncanny fragments of music—an Australian aboriginal in the throes of religious frenzy; a Mongolian *lama* in a fit; a white man being tortured in Papua; and many others of equal interest. His exploits had gained him, and indirectly the college, considerable notoriety which Moran and I, as future heads of the music department, did not mind at all.

But when Draxton announced his intentions of searching for the sound of death, we shook our heads. Old age had caught up with him at last, we said.

"Such an absurdity!" I said. "Draxton, you are a scholar, not a mystic!"

I shall never forget the withering scorn in the look he gave me as he replied. "Cathers," he said, "you are a young man yet. You are bound by convention and surrounded by books, just as I once was. You cannot see beyond your books. You scoff at my theory as though it were the product of second childhood. (Precisely, I thought to myself.) But let me tell you, Cathers—and you, Moran—I'm no mental debilitant. I know what I am doing. I am positive that what I look for exists. It has taken me years to reach the point where I am capable of finding it, and I don't intend

to be thwarted by a pair of disbelieving bookworms!"

What can you do with an eighty-year-old man who has ideas? Next to nothing. Finally, to humor him, we gave our assurances of cooperation. I don't think we fooled him into thinking that we were sincere, but he was so full of enthusiasm that even Moran, an inveterate skeptic, said to me, "Do you think maybe he has something here, Cathers?"

I frowned him down.

DRAXTON went ahead with his plans, unphazed by the rumors and whispers that went on behind his back. Funny thing about those whispers. The word soon got around the campus that old Professor Draxton has gone off his nut at last. But somehow Draxton never became ridiculous. In the sight of his lean, gaunt figure ambling slowly across the campus one saw more to be in awe of than to laugh at. Perhaps the fact that he was so close to death himself lent credulity to his otherwise insane plan.

Moran and I saw him off at the depot. He seemed calm and detached as we stood on the platform, awaiting the train. Neither Moran nor I felt very talkative. I was cold and dry inside.

The train pulled in at last, and it was

"The drums kept up the slow, incessant rhythm of the fading soul!"

time to say good-bye. As I shook Draxton's hand, I shivered; it was as if I had shook the hand of Death itself. Draxton chuckled as he stepped aboard.

When the train was gone, Moran and I looked at each other. We laughed.

It was a hollow laugh.

IN A few weeks we were again absorbed in the academic life and Draxton was no longer forefront in our minds. Yet in my odd moments I found myself mulling the whole thing over. Was it possible that in spite of the teaching I had been brought up on, Draxton could be right? Could he actually bring back the sound of death? He had found just about eevrything else. Why not this? *Why not the sound of Death?*

I shuddered. It was beyond the imagination. Yet before my eyes the picture of Draxton, calm, self-assured, confident, arose, and again and again I found myself debating whether it was possible.

Another realization dawned on me.

Draxton had never failed to find what he looked for.

Our first communication arrived five weeks after Draxton departed. It was dated two weeks after he left, which meant that in all probability he was by now at his destination.

The heart of the Celibes! The very thought of the South Seas heralded visions of an utterly foreign world, a world of mystery and romance, where the bridge between life and death was no great chasm as in our world.

Draxton kept in good touch with us, sending frequent letters and occasionally samples of his work. These were recordings which he made of the sounds he picked up among the natives of the Celibes. We listened to these by the hour. No question, they were remarkable records. Draxton had the knack of getting what he wanted. Such a collection of rhythms and melodies we had never heard. To anyone who has not heard the music of primitive peoples it is difficult to transmit a description of it. The close affinity between nature and primitive man is incomprehensible to the civilized mind, for civilization has created a sharp distinction between the two, man and nature. For this reason the music of primitives expresses itself more directly than does civilized music. The canoe song which Draxton managed to record on wax, for example, was saturated with the feeling of the ocean as the tiny canoe bobbed up and down on it, the paddles dipping gently, the salt water spraying.

Things went on for five or six months like this; Draxton writing regularly, sending us samples of his work, pursuing his task diligently. Then for a period of more than two months we heard nothing. Nothing at all. Draxton was an old man, and we decided that death had at last caught up with him—before he could catch up with it. Everyone commiserated that it was as well he had died in the pursuit of the work he loved most. It was only as he would have wished it, we said.

Then it came.

We recognized the package by Draxton's shaky script on the address label. We had given up hope of hearing from him again, but he had fooled us again.

"Open it!" Moran demanded, eagerly.

The package contained a record and a short note.

The note said: "At last I have found it! Wish you could be here to share this moment with me. It is the crowning achievement of my life!"

The record bore a label:

DEATH-SOUND, CELIBES; 1941

I looked at Moran. He looked at me. For a moment neither of us could speak. Then, "For God's sake, Cathers! Put it on . . . let's hear it!"

Trying to conceal my interest I spun the phonograph turntable and put the disc on.

With hands that shook so that I could scarcely lift the needle-arm, I set the needle at the start of the spinning record.

We waited.

"He's jesting with us," Moran spat; "he's lived for this moment. It's a trick. We're being suckers. It's just a fake."

BUT it was no fake. As we listened we were transported thousands of miles away, to a lonely, primitive island. We could see the scene almost as clearly as if we were there. We heard the beat of the drums. It was the drum-beat of the death-watch, we recognized that from Draxton's previous recordings. Someone was on the verge of death, and around him were clustered the members of his tribe, waiting for the moment to arrive when the last breath left his body. The drums kept up the slow, incessant rhythm of the fading soul.

And thousands of miles away the closeness of death hugged us.

It gripped us and would not let go. It became torture to listen. Building, building . . . the closer death came, the louder, more insistent the beat was. Building for the climax. The Great Climax! We leaned forward in our chairs, caught up in the wake of the ghastly death-watch; it dug down deep until it reached the very inner substance of our bodies. We shook uncontrollably, completely under the spell of the death-beat.

Then it stopped.

We didn't move a muscle. There was dead silence in the room.

Dead silence!

Then a voice.

"Draxton!" Moran yelled, leaping from his chair. "Cathers, that's *him!*"

That was Draxton all right, but there was somethng about his voice that was more terrifying than the beat of the drums. He spoke unintelligibly, apparently in a native tongue, and it was more a scream than a coherent statement.

The drums began again, this time taking up a new rhythm, which we took to be that of the funeral procession.

Moran wiped the perspiration from his forehead, taking a deep sigh. "Thank God that's over," he said. "What was he saying, Cathers? What was wrong with his voice? He sounded almost as if—" He shuddered as he tried to finish.

"Yes," I said, "his voice was definitely peculiar."

After a moment's silence Moran said, "What—what *else* did you hear, Cathers? Anything?"

"No. You?"

He shook his head, taking another sigh. "After the drums stopped there was a moment's quiet. But Draxton's voice got in the way."

"That's that," I said. "I guess that proves—"

"Proves absolutely nothing," Moran cut in, sharply. "*We* heard nothing. *But Draxton did!*"

Nothing much was said about it between us for a while. The end of the academic year was rolling around, and summer vacation was in the offing. The both of us were on the crabby side until school was out. Something itched inside of us.

As soon as the last student left the last class of the year, Moran and I got together and exchanged gratitude that the year was over.

"What about vacation?" I said. "Going East this year? The mountains? The sea?"

He eyed me narrowly. "You know damn well where we're going on our vacation, Cathers!" he said.

As we made our way very slowly through the thick underbrush, the heat was

almost unbearable. It gripped us in its terrible embrace until we could scarcely breathe. The air seemed to stick within us, it was that heavy. And all around us the chatter of hundreds of simian creatures and weirdly-colored birds made the air seem charged.

Moran brushed aside a huge leaf to expose a brilliantly-colored bird of all different hues, with bright red hackles standing on the back of its head.

Moran looked for a moment and said, "I don't believe it." He mopped his brow as if to shake off an apparition. "How far have we gone, Cathers? It seems as if we have been on this infernal trail for weeks."

"It's only been three days since we landed," I said. "It just seems longer. The heat and everything."

WE TRIED to keep up our detached academic attitude, but it was no dice. Civilization melted away into a vague memory, and all we could see was the dense underbrush and the perspiring natives carrying our supplies, and the curious faces of the chattering monkeys and the impossibly brilliant plumage of the jungle birds. It was nerve-wracking, for in this atmosphere our previous beliefs seemed to have no relevance whatever; the whole affair connected with Draxton seemed more plausible than not. We were caught in the spell and couldn't break it.

Suddenly Moran gripped me.

"Look ahead!" he said, tensely.

I looked. A sleek black figure emerged from the brush and ran toward us.

"It's one of the scouts they sent ahead," Moran explained. "Maybe he's found...."

We waited while the scout delivered his message to the chief of our natives. We couldn't understand what he said, but we were conscious of the murmur which spread among the natives as they listened. Their eyes turned to us. They seemed to be whispering something.

Finally the chief came toward us. His face was a mask of tense emotion.

"Please," he said, in his labored English, "we find man called 'little-man-of-death.'"

"That must be him!" cried Moran. "Cathers, we've found him!" He spoke to the chief. "Where is he? Where did you find him?"

The chief lowered his eyes to the ground. "We find 'little-man-of-death,' but we must not go there."

"Not go there!" Moran exploded. "Why not? What's to prevent us?" He looked from the chief to the natives huddled in the background. "What's up, Cathers? Can you figure it?"

"They're scared, Moran," I said. "Maybe we're treading on sacred territory. You know these natives."

"But we *must* go on! We can't stop now, just when we've reached him."

We proceeded to work on the chief and the natives. Finally we convinced them that we meant no harm to them or to their land, and that it was of the utmost importance that we find the "little-man-of-death." The fact that we offered to pay double may have had something to do with it. But even though they went on with the journey, the natives did it reluctantly. Our progress became much slower, despite the fact that we were getting onto higher ground where there were few trees and almost no underbrush.

"We really mustn't hold it against these natives," Moran whispered to me, as we travelled along. "They have their superstitions, and one can hardly blame them for being a little afraid at times."

We were in rugged country now, with great hills sloping to the right and left. Some of the hills reached dizzy heights. We were travelling between the hills, along a winding valley that seemed to double back on itself every few hundred feet.

For two days there was no sign of life

of any kind, save for an occasional *orang-utan,* and once a rare *gibbon.* The natives plodded along silently, saying nothing. We found conversation a little difficult ourselves. I could think of things to say, but when it came to saying them they stuck in my throat.

Toward evening we saw it.

At first it appeared to be just another cliff, jutting severely up into the sky.

But as we drew nearer to it, the natives stopped and refused to go on. An overwhelming fear had pervaded them.

The chief came up to us. "We stop here," he said. "You go alone."

Moran shrugged. "So we go alone."

While I prepared sufficient supplies for the two of us, Moran got instructions from the chief to find the "little-man-of-death."

We went along, blithely at first, but gradually more and more slowly as we approached the great cliff where the chief said we would find Draxton. We lost sight of the cliff for a few minutes as we entered a grove of trees. When we emerged from the grove, we were standing directly in front of it.

The sun was behind it, and made it stand out like a huge thumb.

WE FROZE. "Good God, Cathers!" Moran choked. "Look!"

Out of the cliff a thousand leering faces peered down at us, like so many opera-goers in balcony seats. For a moment I had the impulse to run madly away, but Moran took hold of me.

"Steady, Cathers! This is where they bury their dead. See? They cut niches in the cliff, and put the bodies in them. Then they stick life-size images of the deceased in the opening. That's what they are . . . just images. . . ."

In spite of the explanation we both stood in awe before the cliff, the nearness of death reaching down and gripping us. I could understand the fear which our natives had felt when they approached this cliff of death.

"Let's go," Moran whispered, at last. "It can't be far now. The other side of the cliff."

We pressed on breathlessly, the fever of the search boiling within us. It was only a short trip until we found him. We stopped before a low thatched hut all by itself near the base of the cliff, under some low trees. We just stood there, too bewildered to make a move.

Then we saw him. He emerged from the tiny hut and stood before us, a gray, colorless shape, shrunken and emaciated, skin and bones. We hardly recognized him. It was as if the hot sun had dried him up to almost nothing. There was no semblance of vital substance in his bones.

But in a moment we knew for sure it was he. A dry chuckle gave him away. He waved a bony hand at us and said in a thick, dry voice, "Well? Are you going to stand there all day?"

We rushed forward. "Good God, Draxton," Moran said, "we barely knew you. How are you? We're glad . . ." A look of absolute terror came into his eyes as he grasped the Professor's hand. In a moment I knew why. It was like shaking the hand of a corpse.

Draxton regarded us with cold eyes. "I rather expected you to come," he said, in a serious tone. "You never were quite convinced that I was wrong. Come inside."

He led us into the hut. Moran and I could hardly stand it. It was choked with air so foul that it was scarcely breathable, the air of crypts long mouldering. Draxton laid his wasted frame on a cot of straw and looked up at us. He set his face laboriously in what was meant to be a smile, but what was for us a terrifying grin.

"Did you get my letters?"

We nodded.

"My recordings?"

Again we nodded.

Teasely, he said, "And my last one? What did you think of it?" His eyes took on a fiendish gray glow. "Did you hear it, Cathers? Did you hear it? What do you say now?" A dry hysterical laughter shook his body. "You scoffed at me once. You didn't believe me. But I showed you. I *proved* that I could do it. I'm an old man, Cathers. But I've done it! You with your book knowledge!"

He settled back contentedly. "This is a wonderful place," he sighed. "Wonderful. You have no idea. No worries, no cares. I thought for a while that I was going to fail. I was so tired. Then I found it, and now I feel as if I could live forever! It's the most wonderful thing in the world!" He fixed us with a thoughtful stare for a moment. Moran and I tried our best to melt away, but he kept us close.

Then his face came close to being alive. "I'll show you!" he burst out. "You can do it, too! *I'll show you how!*"

"Easy," Moran said. "Don't excite yourself."

Draxton's eyes stung. "You don't believe me yet, do you?" He relaxed, throwing up his hands a little. "We shall see," he breathed. "We shall see." All life seemed to drain from his body, but his labored breathing told us that he was still alive.

We left him alone. Neither of us could talk. We had found Draxton all right—

IT WAS late evening when the drums began. We sat by Draxton's cot waiting for him to pass on completely, but some stubborn instinct in him refused to give up. At the sound of the drums, he opened his eyes.

"Do you hear that?" he whispered, eagerly. "It has come at last. Thank God! Someone is dying. They are bringing the body. Now you will see for yourselves."

I tried to give him a drink, thinking it might make him a little stronger, but he refused it.

"No, Cathers," he said, "that won't help me. There's only one thing that will help me."

"What's that?"

"I've got to hear it again!"

We froze. Ever since we found him the feeling had been hovering over us. Now it struck, coursing through our veins and chilling them.

Draxton talked on. "I am very weak now. It has been so long since I've heard it. There hasn't been a death in weeks. I don't think I could hold out much longer. Let us go down to the cliff."

Too terrified to refuse, we carried Draxton to the cliff of death, where the death-march was heading. They had built huge fires before the cliff, one huge one dominating the rest. The flames flung rosy streamers that made a ghostly spectacle of the theatre of corpses above us.

"This is it. This is the place." It was Draxton's voice, in a sibilant whisper, eager, anticipating. Moran and I said and did nothing; we just watched. Draxton had an amazing technique with the natives. They made way for him, paying him respect that amounted to worship.

The ceremony was long and painstaking, but breathless. The incessant beating of the drums would not let us rest a moment. Soon the whole group, including Moran and I, was suffused with the nearness of death. The combination of the drums, the weird chants of the *marsalai* who functioned to keep evil spirits away, and the impenetrable stares of the long-dead watching from the cliff was enough to get anyone.

"Closer, closer," Draxton was saying, as the drums beat to a feverish pitch. We approached the body. The natives were getting ready to give up the spirit of the deceased. Draxton's face was livid in the glow of the fires.

We were close to the body. The drums were rising to an impossible crescendo. Rising . . . rising.

Then they stopped.

I felt faint. I closed my eyes, tried to think. But it was useless. I couldn't move. I couldn't do anything. I swayed dizzily. A strange, deadly chill was beginning to creep up inside me. For a second I felt tempted to surrender, to give up, to let the chill envelop me.

Draxton's voice rose to a tight scream, pleading, calling: "Do you hear? Do you hear? There it is! Cathers! Moran! *Listen! Listen!*"

I started to sink, to let myself go . . .

Moran's voice cut in sharply. He shook me violently. "Don't Cathers, don't! For God's sake, don't!" he yelled.

I shuddered uncontrollably.

Draxton screamed exuberantly, dancing, his thin figure making weird shadow patterns on the ground. We watched fascinated for a moment.

Then Moran whispered, "Hurry! We've got to get out of here!"

We ran. My legs were rubber, but somehow I made them move. Moran bolstered me, urged me on, wouldn't let me stop until we had gone at least three miles. Then we fell exhausted to the ground. I was too weak to speak. I felt as though I had escaped death itself.

In a few minutes Moran said, "Cathers, are you all right?"

I nodded weakly.

"That was close, Cathers. Another moment and—" he laughed hollowly. "Funny, wasn't it, Cathers? Here all the time we thought—" our eyes met, and for a moment the chill returned. We said nothing more.

WE reached home in a little over three weeks. At the train our wives were waiting to meet us.

"Did you find him?" Was he there?"

I exchanged glances with Moran. "No, dear," I said, "we didn't find him. We were too late. He died some time before we reached him."

I stood there for a few seconds waiting for the sick chills to pass. Then we went home.

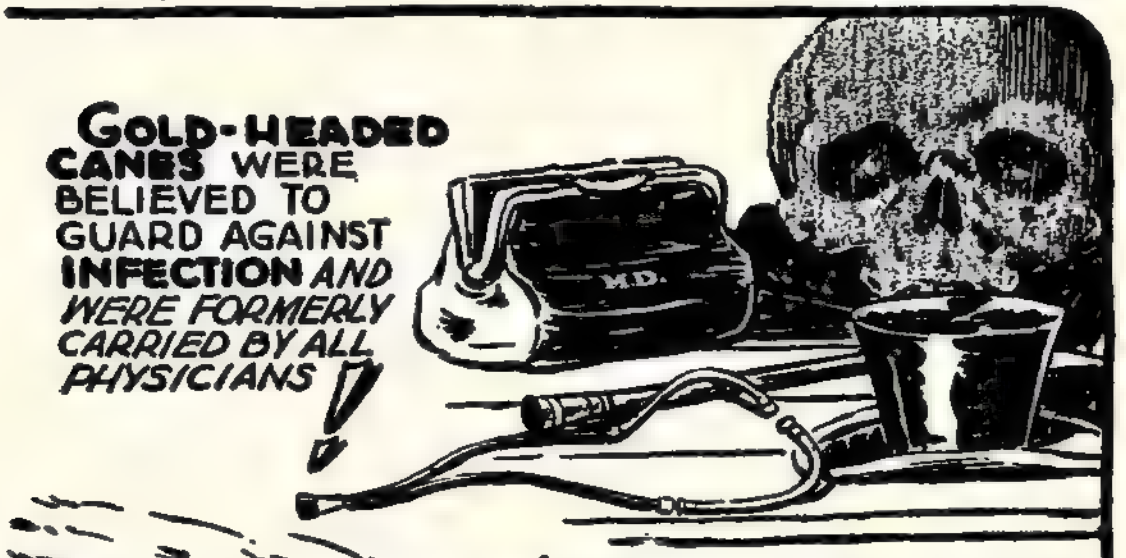
SUPERSTITIONS

A COMMON CUSTOM AMONG THE SOUTH SLAVS IS FOR A GIRL *TO DIG UP THE* ***EARTH*** *FROM THE* ***FOOTPRINTS*** *OF A MAN SHE LOVES* ***AND PUT IT INTO A FLOWER POT...*** INTO THE SOIL SHE PLANTS A ***MARIGOLD,*** A FLOWER THAT IS THOUGHT TO BE FADELESS. CARING FOR IT TENDERLY, SHE BELIEVES THAT AS ITS GOLDEN BLOSSOM GROWS AND BLOOMS, ***SO SHALL HER SWEETHEART'S LOVE GROW AND BLOOM, AND NEVER FADE!***

THUS THIS LOVE SPELL IS SUPPOSED TO ACT ON THE MAN ***THROUGH THE EARTH HE TROD!***

AND TABOOS

by Hill



GOLD-HEADED CANES WERE BELIEVED TO GUARD AGAINST INFECTION AND WERE FORMERLY CARRIED BY ALL PHYSICIANS!

AMONG SOME INDIAN TRIBES OF NORTH AMERICA WHEN A MAN DIED HIS WIFE WAS SHUT INTO A GRAVE WITH HIM FOR A PERIOD OF A YEAR! DURING THIS TIME HER FAMILY WAS PERMITTED TO BRING HER FOOD BUT NOT UNTIL THE END OF THE YEAR WAS SHE ALLOWED TO MINGLE AGAIN WITH THE OTHERS!

The High Tower

BY EVERIL WORRELL

New York's towers are grounded in granite—mighty crystal sets that can contact powers beyond our little earth!

AS DUSK came on, the fog deepened. White-dark, it pressed against the windows. New York was a skeleton city wrapped in its shroud. Gaunt shadows were the buildings, ghost-lights the neon and electric signs, and the room in which Elin faced the old gentleman across a double mahogany desk was a lost tower in a medieaval fortress which thrust against the sky in no real land. Life is beginning again, and I am favored and fortunate, Elin told herself; but she felt like one caught in a strange spell and moving toward some unhappy doom.

The old gentleman's eyes were pale and a little foggy too, and the heaviness of his eyeglasses gave them the effect of being very large and of pressing against the glasses as he looked at Elin, somewhat as the pale fog pressed against the windows of the room. Dr. Grunch—master of many sciences.

Trail-blazer in astronomy and radio and chemistry—an impossibly comprehensive combination. Elin had gotten the position of secretary to Dr. Grunch through high favor and influence. The doctor had gone into business some years back, had become a minor executive and then a more important one in the office of an airplane factory—and finally this position of great trust at the headquarters of the greatest airplane manufacturing company of America in war time. He was greatly trusted in Washington; greatly trusted by men high in the Department of Justice.

He looked across the mahogany desk benevolently.

"Elin is a lovely name," he said gently.

"Well— Here we are, cut off from the world—I and a lovely girl bearing a lovely old name—high above the city in a fog like the one that veils the Styx."

He fell silent. Somewhere a victrola played softly the Song of India. Elin knew the words: "Somewhere in our islands—Pearls and rubies laden—" More than ever she felt as though she were dreaming a strange dream in which she had passed beyond the limits of the world.

"My dear, I want to talk to you. An agent of the F.B.I. recommended you to me—a highly trusted man. With the United States at war, with our Fifth Column here, with the need of our planes across the ocean, our work is highly confidential. I believe you yourself have a strong motivation, an unusual patriotism and devotion to the cause of our defense. There was something, too, about suspicions which you held in regard to your husband's death, and some plan of investigation and vengeance on your part. In connection with this I may be able to help you; also it may be that our roads run parallel or even cross. I will recite to you my understanding of your case, and my dictograph will record my recital and your answers—for reference and convenience, as a correct record of a statement of fact. Is this agreeable to you?"

Elin's consent was eager.

"Richard had some strange theories about the underlying cause of world condi-

tions. Vampire-like aggression, sadism; bleak inhumanity—loss of human characteristics by sound psychological standards. Richard said the parallel developments on both sides of the wide oceans and under every sky had a reason that had been neither grasped nor guessed at by our statesmen, our investigators or defense agencies.

"Richard believed the earth—*the whole earth*—to have come under some ruthless coldly-cruel domination from afar. The Scriptures foretell an Anti-Christ. Richard believed some darkly evil Power *from afar* had established contact—and empirage over—a part of our world. Over the minds of certain groups of peoples in a sort of mass hypnosis; over the minds of

their leaders, most of all—using these leading minds as burning glasses through which rays of distilled evil focùssed upon our planet."

There was a pause in the girl's recital. It had been impassioned; she was coming now to the blacker part of her own personal tragedy—to that which was harder to tell. And in the short time she took to gather courage, she heard the muted strains of majestic music which she knew well—Rubinstein's Kaminow Ostroev.

Her spoken story was being recorded, Dr. Grunch had said. A second victrola, then, was playing the music—or a radio. She was glad for the music; from such music as this she had always drawn strength. And now she was ready to go on.

"RICHARD and I had a summer cottage on the south shore of Long Island—the place was isolated, other campers few and not very near. I spent a weekend in town.

"Richard had been having strange annoyances. A very valuable ring was charged to him at an expensive jewellers' on Fifth Avenue. Someone had taken the ring 'on approval' in his name, having furnished some sort of forged identification. Richard would have been seriously embarrassed but for the fact that he could prove he hadn't been in New York on the day or during the week when the ring was taken from the store.

"Richard believed this was one of a series of attempts to discredit him because he was trying to interest the Department of Justice in certain lines of investigation he had been following alone. The jewellers' firm never recovered the stolen ring; but Richard obtained a copy of a letter the firm had from the man who took the ring. Richard's name was forged on the letter, which was partly in longhand, in handwriting which was a close imitation of his. I have the letter now, and I am going to run down the writer—some day, somehow—"

Again Elin's voice trailed into silence. Again she listened for a moment to the music which underran her story like the sweeping grandeur of an operatic musical theme behind a story of stark tragedy.

"You said you wanted to question me. I am sure, though, you want my account of—what happened when Richard was alone at our cottage.

"The cottage burned to the ground with Richard in it. I have always believed someone came in at night and killed him first. There was a man we had seen hanging around—but we thought he was a tramp. I —would know him again. It—Richard's death came too soon after the failure of the plot to involve him in the theft of the diamond ring. It was not coincidence— I would know that man again, though I saw him at dusk and with his face half concealed. I'd give my life to unravel the plot —which I believe concerns the country, our country; as much as it did Richard and me. I'd give my life."

The strains of Kaminow Ostroev were nearing their soaring climax. Dr. Grunch leaned forward across his mahogany desk, and spoke with unusual clearness and precision.

"You, Elin Kingsley, returned to your summer camp and found it burned to the ground, your husband dead in the embers?"

Shuddering, Elin answered as concisely, as though she were on a witness stand.

"That is right."

"And you state your willingness to bend your efforts to bring the murderer to justice?"

They seemed, both of them, to be speaking in a balanced rhythm; to be following the music.

"Yes, I do. With all my heart."

"This statement is given freely and of your own accord?"

Odd phrasing: but—

"Quite freely. Yes."

Soft—high—pure were the last notes as the music ended. Dr. Grunch pressed a button on his desk and spoke into the dictograph.

"Send me Donald Almaric."

During this next pause, Dr. Grunch whistled softly: something from "Martha". Most unwelcomely, Elin thought of men in high position and of great cruelty who had been strangely addicted to beauties of line and color and harmony: dilletante artists who meted out judgment and death in time to music—

Her imagination was feverish, she told herself; yet there was a brutal heaviness of jaw to Dr. Grunch that affected her oddly, and which she had not before noticed.

Quick steps entered and crossed the room —stopped, somehow jerkily, by the double mahogany desk, as a deep voice said quietly: "You wanted me?"

"As a witness, first. Listen to this recording."

Still without leaving his seat—he was a large, heavy man—Dr. Grunch pressed a button which started the hidden victrola again. Made, the record was to be played back at once. Super-equipment, Elin thought. Listened, then: with horror unutterable, which grew moment by moment until it reached the unendurable which still must be endured.

THE strains of Kaminow Ostroev were there, and against them, in narrative, a voice. The voice was that of Dr. Grunch. The words—a devil might have concocted them.

"You were camping with your husband in a cottage on the south shore, in a lonely, isolated place. Your husband devoted himself to investigations prompted by patriotic concern over the national emergency, and these investigations and his patriotism wearied you unspeakably. You put a sleeping potion in a highball which you then induced him to drink, and, when he was unconscious, you set fire to the cottage, burning it to the ground. You had previously registered at a New York hotel, and you were not accused.

"You, Elin Kingsley, confess that you thus murdered your husband?"

Elin held her breath. That music— It had been playing just this part when he began to interrogate her a while ago! She listened, in an agony. And her own voice—unmistakably her voice—came back in nightmare horror to her ears:

"That is right."

"And in view of evidence which I hold against you, to persuade me for the present to silence—you testify the foregoing statement is true?"

"Yes, I do. With all my heart."

"This statement is given freely and of your own accord?"

Elin's heartbeats drummed in her ears. These were the words Dr. Grunch had really spoken to her, to which she had answered— And again she listened to her own voice:

"Quite freely. Yes."

She was sick, and the floor—was rising crookedly before her darkening eyes. From a distance she heard once more Dr. Grunch's voice, and now it was rather tired and very old, very gentle:

"Catch her, my boy!"

Arms held her, though she tried to rally, to struggle, as though they were the arms of an executioner—which, she knew as knowledge failed, they might well enough be. But they did not feel evil; only strong.

Then she gave up consciousness gladly, escaping from shock and hurt beyond endurance.

It seemed long afterward when Elin's senses returned to her, and perhaps it was, though outside the high window above New York the night was unchanged and the fog still pressed.

"She'll be all right. Take her home for me, Don."

She struggled to a sitting posture. She had been lain on a divan.

"What—are you going to do to me?" she pleaded with dry lips.

"Now— Now, don't excite yourself. Naturally, you were quite shocked. I might be forcing your resignation; I might have designs on your life, and wanted this record to make your death appear suicide. I might be motivated in many ways.

"Let it be left for now at this.

"You are my subordinate here. I have the policy of acquiring absolute control over those who work close to me. For various reasons, such is the case with you. You are, for the present, to go on as you expected to do. Forget your husband's work, however, and his theories, and your schemes for revenge. You will be busy with your work here, and we do not want you to endanger yourself—or to be otherwise active independent of your official duties. And that is all. Come tomorrow—but not early, if you are too tired. Now—Good night."

It was dismissal. Thank God for that. For the rest? Still nightmare and uncertainty. And this stranger Don Almaric was to take her home? She would have preferred to go alone, felt more reassured to go alone; but she dared not even speak. Silently she nodded a sort of mute acquiescence to Dr. Grunch's orders and went with the man to whom he had consigned her. He was tall and strong, and wore, she now saw, the clothes of an aviator, having on dark sun glasses as though he suffered some eye injury.

Silently and together, the two of them went out into the night.

In the taxicab, Elin again felt faint. Dizzy and a little sick after the strain and shock of a while ago. Holding on to herself to combat the feeling of weakness and malaise, she was unaware when the cab left its course toward her apartment. It stopped, after a while, before a brownstone house in the East Eighties, and she yielded herself to the guiding arm of her companion, who helped her out into the dark, murky air. And then she drew back, wearily resentful, nervously apprehensive.

"I gave you my address— You've brought me somewhere else!"

ANGER and weakness struggled for possession of her, and her voice trembled, further unnerving her. But the tall man at her side turned to her in a sudden eagerness that cut through her misgivings, taking his hand from her arm as though to leave her a free agent even while he commanded her presence with him.

"Mrs. Kingsley—Elin—You've got to listen to me. This is where I live, and you are quite safe with me. You must come in for a while—an hour—half an hour. There are things I must say to you. Things you must know."

Reassured, yet not entirely, Elin bent her head. After all she was going it blind. Caught in a net; playing a game of which she did not even know the name—if there was here a chance to learn, it must be taken. She had been near to death tonight, she had thought. The openness of Dr. Grunch's treachery told her he would stop at nothing. To be afraid would not help her. There was no escape from fear, which would walk beside her, work with her, accompany her home in the dark winter evenings. The only hope was to learn something that might help—if there was anything that could help—

The house was a private one remodeled into a rooming house. Donald Almaric's room was on the second floor, and at the back.

"This is quiet, and more or less my own place. I fixed it over a little. But I may not be here so very long—almost anything would have done."

The silence after this little speech seemed to speak. And the language it spoke was sinister. Service under Dr. Grunch might be short and perilous. Elin feared him, and he held her in a vise. She had thought she also feared Donald Almaric; but perhaps he was as innocently well meaning a person as she herself had been when she walked into Dr. Grunch's set-up. Two well-meaning flies, thoroughly enmeshed in a web from which release perhaps could come only through death. One false step in a maze where pitfalls waited for unwary feet that did not know where they were going—

She shuddered, and Almaric seated her in a chair before the fireplace, in which a fire was laid. He bent over it, striking a match; and Elin studied him—his tall, well set up body, and the shape of his head, and the way it was set on his shoulders. There was something about him that was very pleasing. Likable in a way in which one does not think of a stranger.

She felt herself blush, and it was rather a pleasant feeling. It had been long since she had done that. The strain, the shock of this evening, had made her come alive. It must have been that.

Then she shrank back into the depths of her chair. For Almaric had moved swiftly as the flames leaped up in the dark fireplace, so that now he knelt before her. He did not touch her—but she felt the power of his thought, of his will, as though they were tangible things.

"You and I must work together, and you must trust me. I don't know where to begin. There is much you have to learn, if you are to help me against such foes as you have not imaged in your wildest nightmares. Foes of ours, because they are foes of this land we love. Foes of God's world, that should be fair and peaceful."

Elin stared back in utter silence into the eyes searching hers. The dark glasses laid aside, those eyes were deep set and deeply burning, and they seemed to ask questions, and to read the answers to those questions without need of words. They were dark; but there was something unusual about their darkness; a hint of clear gray depths that changed almost to black from an enlargement of the pupils. And, keen as the eyes were, there was in them a look of strain, almost of pain. The dark glasses were worn, then, for grave reason.

When Almaric spoke again, Elin's shrinking turned to trembling.

"There's no way to say what I must, but the shortest. I know where to begin, now; it must be with you and me; and you must trust me—beyond all possibility you must trust me. You see, there is no time; we are like two who might have met during the French revolution under the shadow of the guillotine. The need of haste sweeps away the need of censorship, of delay, of weighing this and measuring that.

"Life is a broken song, and love another, and I love you; and when we part tonight it may be forever, because I go on a journey that may take me out of your life—and out of life. Now there is no time for any more of this, any more than we would have time for the things people have time for to whom life is a long, slow, aimless softness. And I would not exchange with them, if tonight is my last night on earth. Only—Only I wish my going—if I must go—were not to accomplish what it must. I go on a mission which means, I think, that I shall locate something it is vital I must locate. But to return with that knowledge is another thing."

As his voice faltered at the beginning of the last sentence, it seemed close to breaking, and Elin was strangely touched. But then he went on strongly, and as he finished his eyes grew compelling and tender.

"I have only one more thing to say about you and me—or rather, about you," he resumed. "Something I want to hear—Elin—with your heart.

"Your eyes are two blue lakes, your

mouth a rose. In your eyes is the wisdom of a beautiful soul, and your lips are a promise that should be kept. But you are a creature of the spring rather than of summer, and you are a lovely moon that is always crescent, and it is so I carry your image with me and think of you.

"Now that is a prose poem about you, Elin, and perhaps I've read too many poets, from Omar Khayyam to Tagore. Anyway, it fits, and those words have been said to you —almost like that—by another, whom you trusted. Elin—Elin—"

FOR the second time in her life, and for the second time in one night, Elin fainted. For the words, or words very like them, that Almaric had used, had been spoken to her twice before—by two men she had loved. Derek first—he had loved her very deeply, and he had written them into a sort of poem, half in prose. Richard had seen that poem, after her parting in anger with Derek—a senseless anger over nothing of importance; Richard had made her forget the pain of it. Richard had loved her so much he had loved that poem Derek had written to her, had said it fitted her, had said the words over sometimes, a little whimsically—

And tonight, to hear them from a stranger—

There was the taste of brandy on her lips, and Almaric stood at a little distance from her as she opened her eyes.

"You must be—have been—a friend of Richard's—or of Derek Lance, to have heard those words. I suppose men do share their dreams sometimes, as women do; though it seems unlike either of them. To hear those words this way, after so long—"

Almaric's smile was quizzical, a little remote.

"There's humor in all things; even love; even death," he said. "I said we have no more time for personal conversation, and it is true. I think you trust me now, and I need that, for I need your help in a cause that is both yours and mine. And yet I wish— I could have uttered that little bit of descriptive blank verse as though it were my thought only—not mentioning any other man. People love once, and seldom twice, and you have the advantage of me, for I've never loved until I saw your face. And I ask you to love a third time, even while I say there is no time for love. If by a happy chance there *should* be time for love, we'll speak of this again. But now—

"I am familiar with Dr. Grunch's method of superimposing one recording upon another where blank spaces have been left, which is the method he used for forging your spoken confession. The music furnished the timing. He does those things sometimes with a deadly object; sometimes merely for practice. He is a mechanical wizard—and, unfortunately, a great scientist. And the purposes and ends he serves—

"I have another record of the doctor's making, and I want you to listen to it. You'll find it beyond belief, beyond explanation. Any explanation should come after you heard it, and after hearing it you will be able to believe what I shall tell you."

In the corner of the room stood a radio-victrola, and Almaric crossed over to it. Elin leaned back in her chair again, not in weakness, now, but with a feeling of ease that was both new and unreasonable. Peace in the face of peril, and a feeling of having reached home after a long journey, just at the outset of monstrous and terrifying adventure. Strange alchemy. But no need to fight it. People weren't blamed for their thoughts or feelings if they stood on the deck of a sinking ship—or if they were cast away on an island inhabited by headhunters. Elin thought of Dr. Grunch and shivered; headhunters who were frankly savages would be so infinitely preferable to smooth old gentlemen of impeccable

manners who plotted to destroy you and all you thought worth living for. But that, of course, was the Fifth Column they had talked and written about at the beginning of the Great War; before they had come to calling it the black cancer, because of the way it ate at the heart of a nation, and then the nation died—or functioned, Zombie-like, an animated corpse.

There came the little sound a record makes when it begins to play. Then words, in a voice that brought Dr. Grunch uncomfortably near, since it was his:

"Conditions are as good as I can bring about. Will you come in? Will you speak?"

Another pause. And Elin knew that Dr. Grunch's voice had held one quality, at least, which she had not heard in it before. Was that quality fear, or was it—awe?

Now another voice. And this was the voice of the person the doctor was afraid of.

The voice of a person who spoke strangely, indistinctly. There was a distortion that suggested distance and transmutation through more than one medium of conductance. There was a suggestion of something *organically* strange—as though a deformed, or strangely formed throat accomplished with difficulty sounds which necessitated painful effort. A phrasing that was foreign—but *that* was a secondary effect. *Slow* syllables that at first meant little, because it was hard for the ear to assimilate then. Slow syllables:

"I COME in. Conditions well. You accomplish much, and it goes fast onward. We will see the race of men go mad, and the resisters utterly destroyed. They quarrel; when a nation takes up brutal arms of aggression, those who love peace most accuse the victims—not the aggressors. That is because they fear to raise the curtains of their windows and look out on the horror that waits; so because of their fear they blame the sufferers. For dare they blame the aggressors, and haste the evil day to them in their turn?

"In cowardice they cringe before the whip. But the whip is a whip of scorpions, and those who dare not stand together shall be scourged in separateness until all their blood is shed. And brother shall turn against brother, arguing and blaming, as in no other civil war ever. They shall blame each other for any warlike word, and yet for lack of preparing weapons at the same time, and in their confusion their minds shall grow dark as night.

"And the aggressor nations, those whose hearts we have won to us, shall conquer; till afterward, WE come. We, from space. We who kill more coldly than any; more insatiably; more utterly. And who reward such as you.

"Keep the way open to *me*, night and day, for the time is near. Increase the mighty arsenal under the wings of the desert mirage. Make sure it is enough to account for your country which boasts so greatly. Guard that arsenal and the hidden place thereof. And fear always the danger of the encroachment of that rare telepathy which is the only threat to our secret plans. If there is one capable of utter heights of pure devotion impersonal and selfless—yet pointed by personal love and loyalty—guided on the hidden path by light from more than one world—rarely is there man or woman like that, and such a one must be destroyed. And now—"

The strange words turned into gibberish.

After it was over, after a little silence, Elin asked:

"A doctrine of utter terror—spread by whom, or—what? Is there a clue?"

Almaric's right hand moved slightly.

"This is a reproduction of a record I borrowed—stole—from Dr. Grunch's files. I turned it off, but there is more. Listen to the end."

The guttural gibberish recommenced. Assumed, slowly, again resemblance to

human words in a tongue unknown, or little known, to Elin. Put on the cloak again of difficulty spoken English, at the end—which was in few words. These were:

"Now I sign off. Sending from Saturn. I, the Lord of Chaos, spoke to Earth."

Lightly, Almaric crossed the room to the deep chair where Elin sat like one lost in nightmare. Lightly he lifted her and carried her to the divan.

"I won't take you home tonight. You are so tired. And if you are safe anywhere, it is here. We are together, I'd live for you —die for you. That means something, even in this darkened world.

"Sleep. I'll lie down in the next room. In the morning we'll talk again, but briefly, for I leave very early."

When the electric lights were snapped off, the room was soft in firelight and shadow. Elin felt encompassed by a white magic that would turn away the evil that lurked—so heavily.

"Sending from Saturn— I, the Lord of Chaos." Some madman. Madness was chaos, and the world was mad, and its madness was spreading. What if—

LIKE tender, soothing fingers the soft lights and shadows slipped across Elin's white lids, closed now in utter weariness. Elin slept.

Somewhere, with great insistence, a bell rang. Footsteps then, that hurried; and an insistent knocking at the door.

Dressed in the clothes he had worn last night, which he undoubtedly had slept in as had Elin in hers, Almaric strode across the room where Elin lay. The dark glasses were before his eyes, and he seemed alert and ready to be gone.

"Those who serve as we serve earn a night's deviation at the price of upsetting the spy system, and must pay for it in one way or another," he muttered as he threw open the door.

Outside a man stood who seemed to Elin vaguely familiar. Something she could not place—but something remembered—

"Mrs. Kingsley? Excuse my following you here—but I have so little time. I found you had been employed in Dr. Grunch's office, and that you had left there last night with Donald Almaric. Not finding you at home, I came here— But what does that matter? Though I think you were told to go to your home.

"I have a message for you, Mrs. Kingsley, from a former friend of yours—and of your husband's. I come from Derek Lance. He went as a volunteer, you doubtless knew, in foreign service against the 'Aggressor Gebund'. I happen to be a foreign correspondent of a newspaper here.

"I was allowed a few words with Derek Lance in hospital—just before his death. He had— Ah, I regret—"

Elin, who had risen, felt herself sway against Almaric's arm. She heard Almaric's deep, bitter curse, and that, more than the touch of his arm, seemed strangely strengthening.

"Derek was a dear, dear friend—of mine and Richard," she heard herself say.

"Go on. I am ready to hear any message he sent, of course."

"He had won spectacular fame as an aviator, in the defense of Britain, and so I sought him out. He spoke of you just before he died. He said: 'Tell her, and all of them, to lay down their arms. The aggressor nations cannot be defeated. Once submission is complete, the world will be reborn. Tell Elin Kingsley to unite herself with those who come to conquer her country, for her country is weak and divided—decadent. She may find safety thus. I've heard she and Kingsley were carrying on inquiries of a dangerous nature. Tell Elin, convince the destroyers of her loyalty to them, before too late. Tell her I died in torture—let her live in safety. Safety is

better than loyalty, and those who fight the irresistible conqueror are fools.'"

Elin stared at the man who had spoken. Nothing outstanding in feature or bearing; a very average man in appearance. Bold eyes that met her own—it was not the eyes that she almost remembered. Something in the set of the shoulders? Not the eyes, but they were so bold, so china-blue that anyone who knew this man should remember them, and she did not.

That awful message from Derek. Message of utter defeat. Of a brave spirit broken. Message of twofold death, that of the body and of the high heart she had known well.

She must thank this man who bore the message. Her dry lips parted and she heard no sound. And then they spoke—of their own volition, for she had not intended the words they uttered.

"You lie. Derek Lance may have died. He never sent that message. They could kill his body, but not his soul. He'd fight what is devilish and vile and cruel till he died—and after he died. As I will."

She was never to forget the look of hatred that came into those bold, china-blue eyes then. But Almaric swung her around by the arms so that they faced each other. She could not see his eyes behind the dark glasses; but something passed between them that was deeper than a look, something for which there were no words.

The china-blue eyes were on Almaric when a sharp word from their owner recalled Elin's attention.

"Mr. Almaric, I stopped by Dr. Grunch's office, as you will have gathered. Beside the message to Mrs. Kingsley, I bear his sealed orders to you. You leave at once."

Only for a moment more his hands touched her, his eyes held her, though she could not see them. Then he spoke quickly:

"I told you I was under orders and they have come. I was waiting for them—

"I leave on Dr. Grunch's mission. Elin, good-by until I come again."

The two men left together. She hoped their ways lay apart; but that was a detail. This mission was one from which there might be no return, and Almaric had spoken casually of returning because of the hateful presence of the messenger.

She must go to the office today, fearful or brave; then better go as bravely as possible. Besides, she couldn't rest. There might be clues—a clue—to the nature of Almaric's journey. He might have told her more. Perhaps he would have done so, but for the arrival of China-Blue Eyes. She must try to find out something more for herself, at the risk of her life—which was no great risk since it was already forfeit as price of knowing too much.

But as she turned in the street, a taxicab swerved close to her, so close that she winced away from it. The door opened, and she felt as though a cavern yawned before her.

"Get in, my dear!" Ah, it was Dr. Grunch. She would not even be allowed the respite of a return to the office and its fears—

"We are also going on the journey Almaric and the man you saw are taking," said Dr. Grunch.

"This is a crisis of international affairs—of affairs reaching beyond this planet, did you but know. They are on their way to the air field. Almaric will fly our plane, but we go as passengers—we others. What is to be done must be well done—and thoroughly!"

NIGHTMARE. Waiting, delay, the commonplace, the unbelievable. The taxi crawling through traffic; and Elin wondered if she could have escaped. She would not try. She longed to be with Almaric. This deck of cards from which they were playing with the issues of more than life and death was stacked against them—but

they would be together. Her heart hastened ahead, to be with him. And there must be a chance; some chance, any chance. She and Almaric trusted each other, were true. This meant, then, more than doubling forces; there was a charm for good in the allegiance of two who were honest and brave.

They reached the airport, found the waiting plane and took off. Elin saw the glint of steel at the edge of Dr. Grunch's coat pocket, in which he hid his right hand; the other man, still nameless to her, likewise kept his right hand in his pocket, which showed no gleam of metal, but which bulged. And so they enplaned and left the earth. No one interfered with Almaric in the handling of the plane. He had his orders; he would certainly have to carry them out.

Dr. Grunch was preoccupied, much of the time, after the first few moments. He took from a huge briefcase which he carried two boxes with sliding covers, and into these he frequently peered.

And the plane's course was westward, its speed beyond any Elin had known to be possible. Still, there were those new bombers from California, that disappeared from sight before their sound reached watchers on the earth, and this plane was not more powerfully motored than that. But it hurled itself through the air—ever westward, and the topography over which they passed in the far upper distance changed—the Eastern mountains were crossed, the Midwestern farmlands, the broad Mississippi a thin ribbon—then the Western prairies and the mesa country.

And here the plane shot downward.

"Lower, Almaric. Pretty low. And when you see something, glide lower and slower, and drop the parachuted parcel—and rest easy about damaging what is beneath its fall. Its damage is not intended for our own center of armament, our arsenal."

Silently, then, the four of them stared earthward. The plane sloped downward. The mesa-land looked like desert pictures, bare, rocky, shining with shimmering dawn-colors although the sun had passed the zenith now.

Then—

Elin caught her breath, half unbelieving. Down there ahead a red light flashed a signal. Its beam was pencil-shaped, and it glared against the full noonday radiance of sunlight on barren ground, sand and rock. The power of light which could show itself distinctly to an airplane against that reflected sunglare was beyond belief.

But something stranger still:

Around the spot from which that red pencil of light proceeded was empty desert. Yes, but was it empty desert? A ghostly, mirage-like picture seemed to shimmer through the light— Elin's eyeballs ached as she stared down. They drew nearer. It was like one picture superimposed upon another. Nearer and lower: and the desert was no longer there. Instead, a walled city, not small, grimly significant, appeared.

It had factories, many of them. A huge field full of bombing planes, row on row of them; another field, like a fantastic giant's parking lot, was full of tanks. Nearby, cannons and anti-aircraft guns. And all of this was an arsenal-city under glass. From a reasonable distance a flier saw only the continued reflection-picture of desert that surrounded those glass walls, because of the slant and thickness of them. No painting made with opaque paints could have been safe from detection as this was safe; the light would play tricks with such a painting, it could be detected. But this shimmery, mirror effect—it had the verisimilitude of mirage, which is detectable only because it is seen in an unexpected place. The mirage-like picture of continued desert would never be suspected in a million years by a flier at ordinary cross-country flight altitudes; because he would see, of course, only what he expected to see—must see: the desert country.

The parachute was launched, went fluttering down. Dr. Grunch went to speak to Almaric. The plane changed the direction of its flight, and continued away for perhaps a quarter of an hour. Then it slanted down and glided to a landing. Dr. Grunch took Elin's arm to lead her from the plane, holding it possessively. She stepped out and looked about her.

This was still unbroken desert. But on the other side of the plane from which she stood now, there was a poor sort of road leading up to an unpainted, dingy desert habitation; a farm house where there was nothing to farm. Elin shuddered a little.

They had landed here, at a place that showed no reason for its existence. Why? Almaric had set the plane down because of those two automatic revolvers which the other men carried. But why had he been ordered to do so?

SHE felt her heart grow sick, and the fainting of her faculties against which she had fought and lost yesterday in Dr. Grunch's office. But now she was harder, she would not faint. Besides, so long as one was conscious, there might be more of a chance. This place resembled a kidnaping hideout, as much as anything. Here where no farm was or could ever be, it might have been used for just that purpose. Well, in that was a little hope, not much. But men and women and children have been kidnaped and never seen alive, and also they have been kidnaped and returned to their own homes and lives. Only—this was hardly a case of holding for ransom.

She knew too much. Almaric knew too much. It was perhaps some protection that no one would believe them if they told what they knew. Yet—

"Tonight we rest here and sleep," Dr. Grunch said in a very oily tone.

"That parcel we dropped contained germs. They are making up some new poison-bombs for our total war against existing governments of the democracies. We who war from within have great advantages, indeed. Why dissemble longer? All of us know the situation. Well—tonight we sleep. Soundly, I hope. I myself can do with a few hours of sound slumber; last night I was busy with the germ-container. Tomorrow—you will know all you wonder about—and will have forgotten all that you know— Will have forgotten.

He looked at Elin, and sighed a little. And the sigh seemed like a seal set on her doom, and Almaric's. He knew what would be done to make them sleep soundly enough to forget—

She felt a scream rising in her throat, and choked it down vehemently. Hysterics would be worse than fainting, because they would hurt Almaric now. She'd walk bravely to meet what came so stealthily—

She walked, in fact, across the road and toward the dingy little house with no prompting. And, his step sounding springy and firm beside her, Almaric overtook and walked with her.

The door sagged open, and they entered the dark, ill-smelling room beyond it. And behind them, following, came the footsteps of the other two. And brief words, muttered low in Dr. Grunch's suave tones:

"Almaric never learned that the explosion that almost blinded him was an attempt at my order, to get him out of the way. This girl—I have a recording in her voice which will impute her disappearance to suicide. We can make good time on this trip and be back in New York tomorrow. One move from either of them—each of us knows what to do with his revolver, my lad!"

The westering sun slipped behind the mesa rim, and when that door closed behind the three men and Elin, it was as though night entered the dirty room with them. A night that would know murder, but not another dawn for her and Almaric

Dr. Grunch looked significantly at his

assistant and nodded; and the latter went into an adjoining room and lit a lamp there. It cast a dingy yellow light, which streamed out through the doorway, lessening the darkness in the room where Elin and Almaric stood with Dr. Grunch. It threw the shadow of that man in the next room who still was nameless on the wall opposite the doorway.

Elin's heart seemed to burst outward and upward, almost to stop her breathing; checking the scream upon her lips because she was suffocating with an unexpected, twisting terror. For she knew that shadow, that silhouette. She had seen it near the camp where Richard was killed. She had felt there was some ugly association connected with China-Blue Eyes—now she knew. This was one of the killers of the international organization that would destroy humanity, as the earth had known humanity. Every one of the vulture-nations had boasted numbers of these professional killers, as they had boasted of their infiltration of professional trouble makers. And she and Almaric were to meet their end at the hand of this man to whom killing was a job.

"Ready, Doctor!"

She moved close to Almaric. For this was the voice of that other, the killer in the adjoining room. But Dr. Grunch turned heavily toward the doorway and passed through it. There was to be a respite—at least of moments.

DR. GRUNCH'S footsteps sounded heavy and ponderous in the next room. Then he spoke—in a tone low, but not low enough to make his words inaudible to the two who listened. And Elin thought—the unspeakable cruelty of letting them hear!

"You will have to subdue Almaric. One shot from either of our guns if he shows fight or makes a move to escape. The door and window locks will hold well enough to give us any warning we need while we are in here.

"If Almaric stays quiet, then a blow on the head when we are ready. In the unlikely event these ruins are ever searched, a bullet hole sometimes shows on the charred skeleton. Take the girl after Almaric. I myself will give her an injection before we fire the house. I am a little sorry for the girl.

"Then fire the shack and we leave. But first I will report progress, that we are here, that we are about to eliminate these two who understand too much of things others would laugh at, and so never believe till all is over. The space-radio—"

Into a short silence broke the crackling sound of heavy static Elin had listened to on the record Almaric had run for her in his room in New York. She shrank inwardly again, her heart and stomach seeming to leave their positions in her body, as the onset of an acute seasickness sometimes makes them seem to do. For she expected now, in this horrible place and in the face of certain and sordid death, to listen to the obscene croakings of whatever monstrosity she had listened to back in the comparative safety of Almaric's room.

Pressing her handkerchief against her mouth, forcing a semi-control of her nerve reactions, she crept close to Almaric, pressed silently against him. His arms closed around her—drew her close—closer.

And in the horrible little room a miracle happened.

What had Almaric told her, back in the comparative haven of New York?

"No time for delay, for play at love—" Something like that!

There was time only for the real, the true, he had said.

He was right. The past was very far away, and death was very near, and here in the room in which she would shortly be murdered, Elin knew again and most unexpectedly the lost rapture of love. Almaric

a stranger? Not that, since both of them had given their lives to one gallant cause, and for it were losing them. Rather, two late met, but bearing each in the inmost hidden place of heart and soul a secret code or signal—an open seasame by which they must recognize each other. Late met, but not too late, since before death they knew—

The world with its imminent horror seemed for a moment utterly to vanish. Because it did not matter.

It was surprise that brought them back to the world around them, made them listen again as they had never listened before. Surprise—and the dawn of an utterly impossible thing. A hint that here, at the end of the road, instead—

"I warned you, fool! Against bringing into contact with the earth-space radio vibrations, fatal things. We found our empire on hate and darkness. Love is a mystery, but we know it radiates something —destructive—"

It was the ugly, awe-inducing voice of the space monster. But it was broken—fading, and swelling, seeming to choke damply and to restore itself to a semblance of coherency by the most impossible and painful efforts.

"You opened the circuit between me and earth *before* those two were killed, in the next room. And they have fused suddenly their beings into a thing rare on earth or any planet—into that kind of love which kills things built on hate and darkness—and that can disintegrate—*me*—

"No— Do not kill them *now*! The circuit is made— They are too near to me— Would find me out and direct the forces on which the universe has been upheld, against me— I, the indestructible, would be destroyed!

"Into dark, cold recesses of lost parts of unused space I—go— You have lost your emperor from space—and your empire on earth— Fool! Fool!— Ah!—"

Into no intelligible syllables the great voice died. If it had been a voice?

Something horrible that had pressed very near was going away. The noise was fading as into distances illimitable, and now it was not like the sound any voice could ever have made. It was a sound like the rushing of something formless going far through emptiness, and sucking and moaning as it went—reaching out for nothing into nothingness—

It was perhaps half an hour before anything more happened after merciful silence fell. Then Dr. Grunch came in.

"The man in there has lived by murder and would hire himself to someone else, and go on living by murder," he said. His voice was very old and very tired.

"He was not expecting me to turn against him. I slipped a hypodermic into his arm, and he will not wake again.

"In New York there is a high tower—the highest of all the skyscrapers. You know the one I mean. We used it to establish a space-radio system beyond the wildest dreams. Something of this you know. The towers of New York grounded in granite were like a mighty crystal set—always potentially the means of contacting powers beyond our little earth. They might have been used for good, perhaps—

"You know how I used them. The high tower must be inspected and our apparatus removed and destroyed. You, Almaric, will see to it. Without the New York station to draw down to earth the farthest radio waves, no other station can receive or send.

"There is, it seems, a higher tower that overtopped the one we used so successfully —the impregnable fortress of an unquenchable soul. When two like that meet a spark is kindled— Well, you heard. It is a spark of the divine fire that built the universe and gave it life, perhaps. It has been fatal to the one I served—has driven him out, away—beyond returning? Well, you heard.

"Without a leader from outside, the evil

in men's hearts will no longer reach to heights of madness. The world can be restored, policed—

"The arsenal in the desert can be used for that. Almaric, you will know what to do—to whom to report—

"I shall stay here. If you send for me, you will not find me. Take the plane, Almaric. Get it into the air with Elin—and leave this place. Elin is very tired.

"Take her home for me, my boy!"

THE plane loomed black against the soft diffusion of starlight on desert, and against the night sky with its brilliant desert stars. Just beyond hand-reach seemed the stars. Elin realized that for a long time she had not looked into the sky with any feeling of uplift. Now, even had she stood alone under the starry spaces, she would have known a joyful serenity.

But Almaric drew her close, as he had drawn her in the dark hut a while ago.

"Those words I quoted about your mouth and eyes and—you—

"They were given me by Lance Derek, as he was dying. He knew that you and Richard, he and I, all served a common cause. He did not guess of course—unless with the strange prescience of the dying—that you could love me ever—though he might have felt, knowing you, that I must love you. Besides, then there was Richard.

"But he gave me those words to repeat to you if time was pressing and danger near, and I must compel your trust. If I must work with you and help you.

"When I first said them to you, they made you listen and believe me. Even then I meant them— And till I die—"

They climbed into the plane, that lifted to the skyway. The stars were nearer then —much nearer; and all around them, as they flew toward the dawn.

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Poor Little Tampico

A fortune teller cooks a very effective, future-revealing stew . . . Only to find herself "in the soup!"

BY HANNES BOK

ON EITHER side of the narrow, rutted mud road lay untilled fields broken here and there by shell-holes, with an occasional farmhouse or the gutted ruin of one. The bullet-pruned trees were bare. It was late winter, though snowless.

Little Tampico was trudging doggedly along the road. His breath fluttered in wavering streamers on the cold air, and he huddled deeper into the tattered man's-coat that enveloped him, digging his hands into the pockets, pulling in his neck to shield his ears under the upturned collar. He was

a small child for an eleven-year-old, large-eyed and bony from constant hunger. He took a hand out of his pocket to feel his stomach, grimaced, and tightened the piece of cord which served him for a belt. He stopped walking and eyed one of the farmhouses speculatively. True, there was smoke coming out of its chimney—but the fields had been uncultivated; they were overgrown with weeds. The sheds had been burned and replaced by a solitary makeshift structure. Still, a goat had been tethered among the weeds, and two chickens pecked the ground by the dwelling's back door—

With a gleam in his eye, little Tampico started for the house, but he had barely set foot off the road when a stone whizzed past his head, brushing his sheep-dog mop of black curls, and an old man with a stick hobbled from the building, shrieking, "Away with you! I've no food for beggars. —there's not enough for myself!" As Tampico halted, eying him, the old fellow shook his stick and stamped a foot. "Get back to the road, and keep moving—or else—" He threatened the boy with the stick.

Tampico shrugged and turned back to the highway. It was his usual reception. Walking along, he took his hands out of his coat, rubbed them together, blew on them. Looking up, he brightened. A village lay ahead. He hurried along eagerly.

It was not a prosperous village. Many of the buildings had been boarded up, and then the boards had been stolen, ripped off perhaps to provide fuel for the thieves. Some of the structures were in ruins, fired or bombed. Tampico looked for the most prosperous-appearing home and went to it. A hard-faced woman, more like a tinted granite statue than human, watched his approach from the one good piece of glass in a cloth-stuffed window. She made no move toward the door at his first knock, but eventually shuffled in answer to his persistent rapping and pushed open the door —it swung outward, and Tampico jumped back—and came out, carefully closing the door behind her. She stood, legs spread wide, her arms akimbo.

"Please, lady—" Tampico's treble began.

She cut him off. "I know—you want something to eat. So do they all, the folk coming through this town. But there's no more food to give away—nothing left at all, not even for ourselves." She shook her head slowly and sadly. "The war took my husband and my oldest son, and now I've three little daughters to care for, and I need every crust of bread and scrap of meat there is. Have you no home of your own?"

Tampico shrugged. "Everybody—everything—was wiped out in Madrid.

The woman's eyes softened a little. "I'm sorry. But you must go on. I can give you nothing." From inside the hut rose an infant's cry, and she looked at the door as if she could see through it. She considered, and Tampico put out a skinny hand, his eyes continuing his words. "Wait here," she said, and went inside, shutting the door after her. Tampico heard the latch click. He shivered and pulled the coat more tightly around himself. The woman came out again with an end of a stale loaf. "This is all I can spare," she said.

Too hungry to thank her, Tampico snatched the bit of bread and gnawed at it. The woman eyed him a moment almost sympathetically, then returned inside. Tampico dropped to the ground and crunched the bread, shutting his eyes in sheer delight.

Finishing it, he arose, spotted a well, and went to it. There was water in a bucket: breaking the ice with his fist, he procured a drink. He turned to the house and bowed. "Thanks, good lady," he murmured. "Tonight—if I remember—I will say a prayer to our little Lord Jesus for you." Then he went out of the enclosure and back to the road.

At the next dwelling five children, all smaller than he, were lined up at the fence. They did not speak, only watched him with large sorrowful eyes. Their clothes were as sadly inadequate as his, though decently patched and clean. Tampico ignored that house.

Three more homes, and the village was behind him. Half a mile down the road, a little off it, was a really well-set-up establishment. It seemed never to have seen the war. Tampico almost ran toward it. But there was an old woman leading a donkey along the road, and on the way they met. The woman looked after the boy.

"Eh, there," she called. "What's your hurry?"

"That farmhouse," Tampico said, halting and gesturing toward it. "I'm hungry—I thought that maybe—" He scanned the donkey, then advanced to the woman. "I'm hungry," he repeated.

The old woman cackled dry laughter. "Well, you needn't look as though you could eat me, she chuckled. "I'm poor as the rest of the folk here. And I'd advise you to pass that house and keep going—it's the house of Elvira, the witch. She eats little children!" And she wagged a finger mischievously.

"Surely—" said Tampico.

"Oh, she's wealthy—as wealth goes these days," the old lady conceded. "But nobody goes near her house—except to have their futures read in their palms and in the bubbling cauldron. And then they pay dearly, too." She sighed. "Elvira does an excellent business these days, what with nearly all of us going to her to ask after our men who have never come back from the battlefields—" For a moment she lowered her eyes to the road, musing. She lifted them to the boy. "Take my advice and pass on to another dwelling," she said, and jerked the donkey's halter. She shuffled along, and Tampico continued along the road with an eye on the witch's farm.

He passed it, yes—but he stopped and looked back. Oh, it was a very excellent farm. He couldn't see them—they were hidden by the house—but he could hear them, quite a lot of chickens, and listen—yes, wasn't that a cow's lowing? And what if the woman inside was a witch? Hadn't the war turned all women into witch-hearted creatures? He started forward, hesitated, then bravely squared his shoulders and went to the house. No woman spied on his approach from a window, no one threw a rock.

The savory odor of cooking drifted compellingly through the cold air. Tampico knocked on the door, but there was no answer. He knocked again without effect. Tampico waited a little, politely, then squinted craftily. He pulled on the door, and it slipped ajar. He peeped inside.

The hovel's untidiness did not disturb him. His eyes roved over the real bed, the beautiful blankets, the several chairs, the beautiful—though badly scaled—large mirror. What interested him most was the flicker of flames in the mud fireplace, and the pot of boiling stew on the grate. No one was in the hut. Tampico glanced anxiously around him. No one was coming. Well, then! He wedged through the opening, pulled the door shut, and rushed to the fireplace, the odor of the cooking sweeter in his nostrils than the music of all heaven's angels could be to the ears.

A ladle protruded conveniently from the kettle, and he took a sip, burned his lips, uttered a soft cry and blinked. Then he cooled the ladle's contents with his breath and really tasted the concoction. He made a wry face. Still, it wasn't every day that he discovered himself alone cheek by jowl with hot food! He took another ladleful of the stuff, and another—and another—

Ah, but this was living! He opened his coat so that the warmth might reach his body; between sips from the ladle he stretched his hands over the blaze. He

kept a wary eye cocked on the door: there was no telling how soon he might have to run. Before he knew it, the kettle was empty.

He arose, swathed the coat around him, and started for the door. He halted and his eyes took inventory of the place. He tiptoed to a cabinet and opened its doors, revelled at the contents—glass jars and paper packets of herbs and spices incongruously lined on the shelves along with the neat cardboard cartons of seasonings and medicines that surely must have been bought in the shops that existed before the war. Here were little glass bottles—he read the labels—iodine, ephedrine, even perfumes. These would be good to trade for food later on. He filled his pockets.

And then it happened. Something went wrong with his stomach, and he clapped a quick hand to it, while simultaneously his face grew white and his eyes round with horror. Mother of God, what was going on within him? He moaned and staggered away from the cabinet, both hands clutching his midriff now. In the center of the room he turned rigid, threw back his head in a scream, and dropped writhing on the floor.

"It's because I've stolen," he whispered through gritted teeth. "Oh, Mother Mary—forgive me! I'll return the things at once—" He forced himself to his feet, staggered doubled-over to the cupboard and replaced the articles he had filched from it. But the pain did not diminish. Everything wavered before him. He rested against the cupboard, groaning.

There were sounds from outside—two people were coming to the cottage. He vaguely heard their voices—two women. What were they saying? Then the door opened, and an old woman and a younger one, heavy with child, entered.

"They were fine fowl," the older woman was saying, "and you're entitled to the finest fortune I can give. Let us have a look at the cauldron—" The women went to the fireplace; the older one peered in the pot, stepped back incredulously, and turned to the other.

"My broth—it's gone!" she howled. "My beautiful broth—!" The young woman peeped into the kettle.

"But, Elvira!" she murmured, "I don't understand—" And at this point, little Tampico inadvertently sobbed. The woman whirled, saw him; the older one pounced on him, dragging him from the cupboard toward the fire.

"You did it!" she accused. "You *ate* it—my beautiful broth! And after all the difficulty I had in finding the ingredients—the bat's wings, the lizards—I had to use dried lizards I found under the barn," she said aside to the young woman. "God's curse on you! And I meant to foretell the future for Maria here—and now you've spoiled it—and I'll have to return the two fine fowl she gave me as fee. God's curse on you!" she repeated, buffeting Tampico's cheek.

THE boy was too sick to resist, merely tottered on shaking legs, his face livid and his large eyes desperately struggling to focus themselves on the witch. The young woman interceded, laying gentle hands on his shoulders. "Don't be too hard on him, Elvira," she wheedled. "He's homeless, I'm sure, and in desperate straits—"

"They'll be more desperate in a minute if he's stolen any of my spices!" the witch replied, bustling over to the cabinet and pushing her face close to the shelves. "No, everything's here, though he's pawed them, pushed them out of place—" Suddenly she grew wooden. "My money, that's it! He's taken my money!" She rushed like a wind-whirled leaf to the fireplace, pried a brick loose and peered into the opening. "No, my money's safe—I suppose he hadn't time to look for it—"

"Elvira—the boy's really very sick,"

Maria murmured, reaching out a hand to the witch. "Come here and have a look at his eyes—something's wrong with them—" Tampico was still rocking on his feet, and her hands attempted to steady him.

"He ought to be sick!" The witch raged, going to the girl's side. She glanced at Tampico's face, started, and peered into his eyes, thrusting Maria away. "Holy name! The broth is still powerful within him, and its fumes are affecting his eyes!" She stared disbelievingly. "Why, it is the same as looking into the bubbling kettle! I can see—" She pushed her nose almost against Tampico's—"I can see the future here! The spell has not been spoiled. God be praised! Draw me up a chair!" Maria hastily pushed a chair under the witch, who grasped Tampico's sides with her scrawny claws and pored into his eyes. "Now what was it you wanted to know?"

Maria wavered, then with some misgivings brought out a chair for herself and sat down. "Will it harm the boy very much?" she asked.

"No," the witch replied. "As soon as his stomach starts digesting the broth its effects will disappear. Quick, tell me what you want to know."

"Well, then," said Maria, "Find out where Manuel is, and whether he is coming back to me."

Elvira peered. "Manuel," she breathed, as though softly calling the man. "Manuel." There was a silence which Tampico broke with a hiccough. "I see him," the witch murmured so faintly that Maria leaned forward to catch the words. "I see him in prison. There are many others. The windows are barred, and they look out of them at a yard where there are other men lined against a wall facing armed soldiers. The soldiers raise their guns—there is a puff of smoke—the men fall—now they are leading Manuel and the others out into the yard—"

Maria's hands flew to her mouth and vainly attempted to suppress a scream. "Manuel! Oh, my beloved Manuel! For the mercy of heaven, quick, tell me what is to become of him!"

The witch put up a silencing hand. "He is put against the wall," she said. "The soldiers raise their guns. They take careful aim. Manuel has no bandage on his eyes, but he does not waver. He will die manfully. But now someone has rushed in waving a paper. The soldiers put down their guns. Manuel is taken out of the yard. Have no fear—he will be saved!"

"Heavens of pity!" Maria exclaimed gratefully. "Tell me more, more!"

Elvira drew back from Tampico. "That is all I can see—Manuel is too far away—" she said.

"But at least I know he still lives and will continue to live," Maria cried rapturously, clasping her hands. "Oh, Elvira, I am grateful to you—so grateful—unless—" Abruptly her eyes narrowed: she dropped her hands. "Unless you saw nothing and were lying—"

The witch arose, bristling. "What do you mean, lying?" Her stance was threatening.

Maria shrank into her chair. "I'm only repeating what the villagers say," she countered.

The witch tossed her head. "They are the liars, not I!" she snapped.

"Maybe," Maria said sweetly. "But I gave you my two best chickens. Why don't you prove that you're not lying?"

The witch stared. "Prove it?"

"Yes—read me what is going to happen to me in the next ten minutes. Then I can judge for myself."

Tampico was recovering himself now, but he still stood as though spellbound. The witch seated herself again and explored the mysteries of his eyes. "You are going to twist your ankle as you go out the door," she told Maria.

The young woman deserted her chair.

"Now I'll prove you've lied," she said. "And you'll have to return my two chickens. I'll leave by the window." She walked triumphantly to the one window of the cottage and tugged on it, but it would not open. She jerked at it again unsuccessfully, then giggled foolishly. "I'll have to go out of the door at that," she said placatingly. "But I'll take great care as I go."

That was the trouble. She was too careful. She picked up her skirts and raised her feet ridiculously high with each step. There was a splinter of wood that had strayed from the fireplace and wedged in the door-sill. She stepped on it, stumbled, and fell flat on her face. The witch hurried to her.

"Are you hurt?" the old woman asked, assisting Maria to her feet.

"No," the other woman replied humbly. "You can keep the chickens, Elvira —your forecasts are true." Nodding goodby, she limped away from the cottage. The witch returned to Tampico, who was still immobile. She shook him violently.

"You!" she cried. "Here, wake up, you! Do you hear me?" Tampico's glazed eyes found her face; he blinked, jerked his head about as though to jar loose the cloud on his mind. "Wake up, do you hear me?" Tampico blinked again, and swayed dizzily. "Are you feeling better now? Are you all right? Answer me!"

Tampico was nearly his normal self by now, he nodded. He wriggled out of the witch's grasp, and sidled toward the door. "Please, lady, I did not mean to steal. But I was cold, and oh, so hungry—" He rubbed his stomach illustratively, and winced. "I will go—"

The witch flew to him and gripped his coat. "No, you won't," she said grimly. "You're going to stay here and pay for the broth you stole by chopping wood for me, young man. You come with me!" She kicked the door open and hauled him outside, around the house to the back yard, where heavy branches that she had dragged in from the wood were lying about. She picked an axe from the ground and handed it to him. "Here. Now get busy. If you do your work well, I may let you stay overnight."

"All of this?" Tampico surveyed the branches with dismay.

"Wouldn't you like a nice warm bed tonight?" the witch asked. Tampico had to admit that he would. Elvira waited until he had begun to work, then went back to the house.

CHOPPING wood was still quite a new experience to Tampico, and eventually he cut himself. He hurried to the witch. "I've cut my hand," he said, as she opened her mouth to upbraid him. "Put some iodine on it."

"Iodine!" Elvira cried. "What does a little beggar like you know of iodine?"

"I know very much about it," Tampico replied proudly, gripping his cut finger. "Before the war took him, my father was a doctor."

"Well—all right—but I hate to waste it," the witch grumbled, and went for the bottle. Tampico made a terrible grimace as she applied the antiseptic, but smiled when she tied a bandage over the cut. "There," Elvira said. "Now go out and finish your wood-cutting."

Tampico bowed and hastened out. The door had barely closed behind him when there was a rapping on it. Elvira opened it. Outside waited Senora Pellicores, Vigrida and old Carlos, from the village. All held offerings—sacks of vegetables—small sacks—bread, even a partly-filled bottle of wine.

"We came to have our fortunes read," Senora Pellicores acted as spokesman. "Maria told us about your wonderful reading to her, and we thought—"

"Come in! Come in!" Elvira cried de-

lightedly. "Put your things down there. It won't take but a minute to start the pot boiling. I think I have enough ingredients left for a new stew—"

Old Carlos stood very erect. "We don't want fortunes read out of the pot," he said with dignity, reaching for his offerings. "We want you to read them for us out of the little boy's eyes."

"The what?" cried Elvira.

"Any witch can read out of a cauldron —we want your special way of reading," said Vigrida, who liked novelty.

"Well, I don't know, but I'll see," the witch answered thoughtfully. "I'll be back in a minute. Don't be impatient." Old Carlos sat down again as she flurried from the room and went to Tampico. At sight of the witch, the boy set the axe aside and pointed his bandaged finger at the neat stack of wood he had chopped. "Is that all right?" he asked.

Elvira glanced cursorily at the wood and nodded. "But that isn't what I came to ask about," she said solicitously. "Aren't you still hungry? Don't you feel that you could eat something more?"

Tampico gaped unbelievingly, then licked his lips. "Of course I could eat something more," he said eagerly. "Do you mean—"

"Then I'll put another pot of stew on to boil." The witch turned toward the house.

"Oh, but I don't think that I could eat any more of that stew," Tampico said. "It made me sick."

"Nonsense!" Elvira rebuked. "Food's food, isn't it? Who are you to be turning down good victuals?"

"But I don't think you used very good meat in that stew," Tampico protested humbly. "It—it tasted queer."

Witch though she was, Elvira felt a little twinge. "It was very good stew," she lied.

"Still—" Tampico demurred.

Elvira stooped over him. "Look, little one. I will make a bargain with you. As long as you will consent to eat my stew you may stay here with me—stay as long as you like, just as long as you eat what I give you, you understand. You won't even have to work. Here, give me that axe." She threw the axe across the yard. "Come now, wouldn't you like that? Well, wouldn't you?"

Tampico considered. He plucked at his tattered coat, eyed his worn shoes, ran his thin fingers through the mop of his uncut hair. "All right, I'll do it," he said, reluctantly.

The news spread quickly. Senora Pellicores met her married sister at the dilapidated shack that was the town market. "Amalia! Have you heard? Elvira the witch has the most amazing way of telling fortunes—and they always come true—"

Vigrida was talking to Paquita, her bosom friend. "I'm so glad you came to visit our village. You must tell everyone at home about this marvellous Elvira and her little boy! Really you've never seen anything like it."

And Paquita told Ramon, her brother-in-law: "Everyone's talking about it—They're saying the most extravagant things!"

And Ramon told Arturo, who told Pedro, who told Captain Gomez, until finally the news drifted into the very chambers of General Blasco himself. The General was seated at the battered wreck of a piece of furniture which he called his desk, while two of his threadbare officers pleaded the case of one Mercio, who cowered against a wall. "Excellency, he deserves your clemency—he has done nothing—"

General Blasco tugged his straggling mustache and cast a casual eye on the prisoner. "I don't care what he's done," he said slowly—his voice was like the rattle of a havily-laden cart. "I don't like his looks. Take him out and shoot him."

One of the officers held out a palm. "Excellency, he's one of my oldest friends."

The General banged a fist on the desk-top, and leaned forward, eyes squinting. "You heard me: Do you want to follow his example? Take him out and shoot him!"

At this moment his aide entered. The General turned on him. "Well—and what do you want?" he roared.

The aide faltered. "I didn't know you were busy—I'll go—"

"Speak your business!" the General thundered.

The aide's eyes roved the men. "Well," he said in embarrassment, "it wasn't much. Only, knowing your interest in the occult, I thought I ought to tell you—"

The General's fist relaxed. "Yes, yes, go on—"

"It seems that there's a witch in the village of Santa Anita who can read the future in the eyes of a little lad—"

THE General waved the two officers and the prisoner away. When they had gone, he indicated a chair for the aide. "A witch who can read the future in a little one's eyes," he marvelled. "I'll see her. Send for her at once!"

"But Excellency, she's miles away—in Santa Anita—"

The General's face contorted. "Go fetch her! I don't care if she's out of Spain itself. Bring her to me!"

"If she'll come—"

"She'd better come," the General rumbled ominously. "Who's in power here, eh? Who? I am, and don't forget it. I'm more than a general, I'm a dictator. My word's law. Go get her!"

The aide stood up. "Yes, Excellency."

The General wagged a menacing finger. "And do it at once— I'll take no excuses—"

"Yes, Excellency—"

But Elvira was having trouble with Tampico. He looked quite a new boy by now. His hair had been trimmed, he wore a beautiful new coat, and he had a bed for his very own. But his complexion was bad: he did not look healthy. And he was subject to fits of trembling.

"Why have you put on your coat?" Elvira asked worriedly. "Are you thinking of taking a walk?"

Tampico bent his head in assent. "A long one. I am going away. For good."

"But Tampico!" The witch fluttered nervously to him, took his hands in her own. "You can't do that! Don't I treat you well? Aren't you better off than any of the children in the village? Aren't you like a child of my own?"

"I'm grateful for your care," Tampico replied. "But I can't stand those stews any longer—especially now that I know what goes into them. Worms, and dead snakes, and toads—it makes me sick to think of them!"

"But where will you be, out in the world alone? You'll be hungry, and have no roof over your head—"

"At least," Tampico said sullenly, "I won't have to be sick all the time, and having nightmares. No, no matter what you say, I intend to go." He jerked his hands from Elvira's and started for the door.

"But Tampico! Listen, my little darling, and I'll tell you a secret, something I did not mean for you to know. I have adopted you, my little one. I have signed the necessary papers. When I die, everything that I own becomes yours—the house, the furnishings, the barn, even the chickens and the cow."

Tampico's eyes brightened. "Really and truly?" he asked.

"I swear it!" the witch cried, blasphemously crossing herself.

Tampico eyed the road through the window. It was still winter, and a sadistic

wind was tormenting the trees. He shivered at the thought of walking homeless. Then he turned to the interior of the hut, toward his bed and its many coverlets. "Well, all right, I'll stay," he said reluctantly. The witch clasped him to her breast forcefully, just as someone knocked at the door. Releasing Tampico, the old woman went to her caller. It was a man in ragged military uniform. He peered beyond the witch into the hut and at Tampico.

"You're Elvira the sorceress?" he queried.

"Yes—you wish me to read your palm, perhaps?"

THE soldier wagged his head. "Not I. General Blasco has sent me to bring you to him. It is he who would have his fortune told—through your child's eyes."

"General Blasco—sending for me!" Elvira cried ecstatically. She hurried to Tampico. "Did you hear, little lad? What a stroke of luck! Perhaps he will maintain us as his special charges!" To the soldier she called, "Come in! How soon are we to go?"

"At once. Only"—the soldier put up a warning hand—"you'd better think hard on it before consenting. You've heard of General Blasco—how terrible he can be? It will go hard with you if he suspects you are duping him."

"Duping him!" Elvira snorted. "Wait until he hears what I can tell him!"

The soldier threw up his hands. "It's your funeral—and I mean just that," he said.

Elvira ignored him. "Come, Tampico, we must pack. Hurry! I'll want all those things in the cabinet—wrap them in a blanket from the bed. I'll have to tell Maria to keep an eye on the place—to watch over the chickens and the cow—" She fluttered about, gathering things to take along—

The General was at his desk. "Well, and so this is the witch and her little fellow. Well!" He beamed genially, combing his mustache with gnarled fingers, his grin reminiscent of a Chinese Fu dog's. "And so you think you can read my future, eh? I'd better warn you, I'll tolerate no lies."

"I tell the truth," Elvira said silkily. "I really can read the future—as you'll find. I'm at your disposal."

"Good," said the General. "How soon will you be ready?"

"In about an hour," Elvira replied. "First I must find us a shelter, then set my pot to boil."

"Good," the General said again. He took his hand from his mustache and pointed at the witch. "I want to repeat, I'll have no foolery. I feel about this subject of the future too deeply. I have certain political aspirations, and I want to know the truth about them. If you try to deceive me, I'll have you shot. Do you understand?"

Elvira smiled. "I have no fear. You will see."

The General singled out one of his men. "See that she gets whatever she requires." To the witch he said, "I'll see you in an hour."

The witch bowed, Tampico bowed, and the man led them from the General's quarters. "Where can I set my pot to cook?" the witch asked.

"We have a place ready for you," the fellow replied. He led the witch and the boy to an abandoned dwelling which had been hastily furnished for the witch. Elvira and Tampico dropped their bundles on a table, and the witch inspected the oddly-shaped little iron stove.

"Wood's over here," the soldier pointed. "Here, I'll light a fire." He busied himself at the stove while Elvira and Tampico unpacked. The soldier watched interestedly while Elvira mixed her broth,

shuddering pleasantly at the sight of the strange things which went into it. He turned to go. "I'll come back for you in an hour," he said.

WHEN the stew was simmering, Elvira beckoned to Tampico. "Come, little angel, you must eat."

Tampico eyed the cauldron distastefully. "Oh, Lord Jesus, when will the day come that I need not eat that horrid stuff!" he complained.

"Come, little sweetmeat. That's no way to talk. If we please the general—as we will of course—he will reward us generously. Think of the prestige it will bring us! We will be rich!"

"Isn't a house and chickens and a cow enough?" Tampico asked.

"Not if we can get more. Surely eating a little of this is worth it."

"But it makes me so sick! My stomach seems to catch fire, and I belch."

"Tampico, don't be difficult. Come now, like a grateful darling."

Tampico sighed. "Well, all right—but I hope this time will be the last."

"That's a good child. Eat it now. Eat it all up." Elvira ladled out the broth. Tampico tasted it. "Ugh!" he grunted, wrinkling his nose, but he continued to eat, and at last the stew was all gone.

"Now that soldier had better come—I wonder what's keeping him?" Elvira murmured. She went to the window, then to the door. Tampico belched loudly. "Oh—oh—oh," he mourned. "I'm sick. I feel awful!" He put his hands to his stomach and writhed.

Elvira was at the door. "I'm going out to call the soldier," she said. "I'll be right back."

Tampico nodded, crouching in a tortured huddle. "Oh," he wailed. "Oh, and oh—and oh!"

There was a threateningly large group of men with guns in the General's quarters when Elvira and Tampico were brought in.

"Well," said the General kindly, "is everything ready?" Elvira nodded. "Then let us begin. But I want to repeat my warning—fail in this, and I'll have you shot, old woman. Now are you ready?"

"Yes, Excellency," Elvira said. "A chair please." She gestured grandly. General Blasco waved a hand and one of the men pushed a chair to the witch. She sat down. "Come to me, Tampico."

The boy went to her and stood before her according to habit. The witch made a few gestures with her hands to heighten her effect, then peered into the boy's eyes. She drew back startled, and peered again. The General strained forward eagerly. "What did you see?" he asked, twisting his mustache.

"Nothing—he isn't ready yet," the witch said. She thrust her face close to Tampico's and withdrew it worriedly.

"Well?" The General straightened up, a frown sprouting between his bushy brows.

Helplessly, Elvira scanned the boy's eyes. "I can't see anything—something's wrong," she murmured.

The General's frown had blossomed now. "I thought so," he said harshly. "Remember, I warned you of the consequences. Make a fool of me, will you—"

Elvira raised her hand in appeal. "I'll try again." She pored over Tampico's eyes, then put her hand over her mouth in dismay. "Please—something's happened—it was never like this before—"

"And it never will be again!" The General roared, tearing Tampico from her. "Take this old fraud out and shoot her!"

"No!" Elvira screamed, dropping off the chair to her knees. "I swear that I can do it! Give me another chance!"

"You've had chance enough," the General shouted. "Take her away!"

Elvira arose, stood looking from one

side to another as though seeking means to escape. Four men pounced on her, grasping her arms. She shrieked, her eyes popping. "Mercy, Excellency, mercy!"

"Take her away!" the General repeated.

Tampico stood looking on indifferently. As the men dragged the witch out of the room, she called after him, "Tampico! Tampico! It was all your fault! You've cost me my life! Whatever did you do that spoiled my magic?"

She did not hear his answer—by that time she had been dragged out of hearing. Tampico waited. There was a prolonged screaming, the sound of a shot, and silence. The four men returned.

"Did you—?" The General asked, fondling his mustache. The men dipped their heads positively. The General turned to Tampico. "Well, little one, what will you do now?"

"Go back to the farm and the chickens and the cow," Tampico replied, his eyes shining. "It's mine now."

"Too bad your mother had to lose her life by her foolishness, "the General said. "Go on, then."

TAMPICO left the room, At the door, one of the soldiers leaned over to inquire, "Why didn't her magic work? She had an excellent reputation."

Tampico reflected. "I don't know. I hated that stuff she fed me. It always made me feel sick."

The soldier's eyes were softly sympathetic. "Did it really hurt so much?" he asked.

"Not this time," said little Tampico. "I thought maybe I'd feel a little better if I took some bicarbonate of soda—and I did!"

Herbert West—Reanimator

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

Many and monstrous were the dead-alive "things" that Herbert West snatched back from the land of the tomb! Episode number two in the young scientist's blasphemous exploits!

II. The Plague-Demon

I SHALL never forget that hideous summer sixteen years ago, when like a noxious afrite from the halls of Eblis typhoid stalked leeringly through Arkham. It is by that satanic scourge that most recall the year, for truly terror brooded with bat-wings over the piles of coffins in the tombs of Christ Church Cemetery; yet for me there is a greater horror in that time—a horror known to me alone now that Herbert West has disappeared.

West and I were doing post-graduate work in summer classes at the medical school of Miskatonic University, and my friend had attained a wide notoriety because of his experiments leading toward the revivification of the dead. After the scientific slaughter of uncounted small animals the freakish work had ostensibly stopped by order of our skeptical dean, Dr. Allan Halsey; though West had continued to perform certain secret tests in his dingy boarding-house room, and had on one terrible and unforgettable occasion taken a human body from its grave in the potter's field to a deserted farmhouse beyond Meadow Hill.

I was with him on that odious occasion, and saw him inject into the still veins the elixir which he thought would to some extent restore life's chemical and physical processes. It had ended horribly—in a delirium of fear which we gradually came to attribute to our own overwrought nerves —and West had never afterward been able to shake off a maddening sensation of being haunted and hunted. The body had not been quite fresh enough; it is obvious that to restore normal mental attributes a body must be very fresh indeed; and the burning of the old house had prevented us from burying the thing. It would have been better if we could have known it was underground.

After that experience West had dropped his researches for some time; but as the zeal of the born scientist slowly returned, he again became importunate with the college faculty, pleading for the use of the dissecting-room and of fresh human specimens for the work he regarded as so overwhelmingly important. His pleas, however, were wholly in vain; for the decision of Dr. Halsey was inflexible, and the other professors all endorsed the verdict of their leader. In the radical theory of reanimation they saw nothing but the immature vagaries of a youthful enthusiast whose slight form, yellow hair, spectacled blue eyes, and soft voice gave no hint of the supernormal—almost diabolical—power of the cold brain within. I can see him now as he was then —and I shiver. He grew sterner of face,

but never elderly. And now Sefton Asylum has had the mishap and West has vanished.

WEST clashed disagreeably with Dr. Halsey near the end of our last undergraduate term in a wordy dispute that did less credit to him than to the kindly dean in point of courtesy. He felt that he was needlessly and irrationally retarded in a supremely great work; a work which he could of course conduct to suit himself in later years, but which he wished to begin while still possessed of the exceptional facilities of the university. That the tradition-bound elders should ignore his singular results on animals, and persist in their denial of the possibility of reanimation, was inexpressibly disgusting and almost incomprehensible to a youth of West's logical temperament. Only greater maturity could help him understand the chronic mental limitations of the "professor-doctor" type—the product of generations of pathetic Puritanism; kindly, conscientious, and sometimes gentle and amiable, yet always narrow, intolerant custom-ridden, and lacking in perspective. Age has more charity for these incomplete yet high-souled characters, whose worst real

vice is timidity, and who are ultimately punished by general ridicule for their intellectual sins—sins like Ptolemaism, Calvinism, anti-Darwinism, anti-Nietzscheism, and every sort of Sabbatarianism and sumptuary legislation. West, young despite his marvelous scientific acquirements, had scant patience with good Dr. Halsey and his erudite colleagues; and nursed an increasing resentment, coupled with a desire to prove his theories to these obtuse worthies in some striking and dramatic fashion. Like most youths, he indulged in elaborate day-dreams of revenge, triumph, and final magnanimous forgiveness.

And then had come the scourge, grinning and lethal, from the nightmare caverns of Tartarus. West and I had graduated about the time of its beginning, but had remained for additional work at the summer school, so that we were in Arkham when it broke with full demoniac fury upon the town. Though not as yet licensed physicians, we now had our degrees, and were pressed frantically into public service as the numbers of the stricken grew. The situation was almost past management, and deaths ensued too frequently for the local undertakers fully to handle. Burials without embalming were made in rapid succession, and even the Christ Church Cemetery receiving tomb was crammed with coffins of the unembalmed dead. This circumstance was not without effect on West, who thought often of the irony of the situation—so many fresh specimens, yet none for his persecuted researches! We were frightfully overworked, and the terrific mental and nervous strain made my friend brood morbidly.

But West's gentle enemies were no less harassed with prostrating duties. College had all but closed, and every doctor of the medical faculty was helping to fight the typhoid plague. Dr. Halsey in particular had distinguished himself in sacrificing service, applying his extreme skill with whole-hearted energy to cases which many others shunned because of danger or apparent hopelessness. Before a month was over the fearless dean had become a popular hero, though he seemed unconscious of his fame as he struggled to keep from collapsing with physical fatigue and nervous exhaustion. West could not withhold admiration for the fortitude of his foe, but because of this was even more determined to prove to him the truth of his amazing doctrines. Taking advantage of the disorganization of both college work and municipal health regulations, he managed to get a recently deceased body smuggled into the university dissecting-room one night, and in my presence injected a new modification of his solution. The thing actually opened its eyes, but only stared at the ceiling with a look of soul-petrifying horror before collapsing into an inertness from which nothing could rouse it. West said it was not fresh enough—the hot summer air does not favor corpses. That time we were almost caught before we incinerated the thing, and West doubted the advisability of repeating his daring misuse of the college laboratory.

The peak of the epidemic was reached in August. West and I were almost dead, and Dr. Halsey did die on the fourteenth. The students all attended the hasty funeral on the fifteenth, and bought an impressive wreath, though the latter was quite overshadowed by the tributes sent by wealthy Arkham citizens and by the municipality itself. It was almost a public affair, for the dean had surely been a public benefactor. After the entombment we were all somewhat depressed, and spent the afternoon at the bar of the Commercial House; where West, though shaken by the death of his chief opponent, chilled the rest of us with references to his notorious theories. Most of the students went home, or to various duties, as the evening advanced; but West persuaded me to aid him in

"making a night of it." West's landlady saw us arrive at his room about two in the morning, with a third man between us; and told her husband that we had all evidently dined and wined rather well.

APPARENTLY this acidulous matron was right; for about three A. M. the whole house was aroused by cries coming from West's room, where when they broke down the door they found the two of us unconscious on the blood-stained carpet, beaten, scratched, and mauled, and with the broken remnants of West's bottles and instruments around us. Only an open window told what had become of our assailant, and many wondered how he himself had fared after the terrific leap from the second story to the lawn which he must

(*Concluded on next page*)

What harvest of unthinkable doom will Herbert West reap from the grim seeds that he has sown . . . ? What are to be the rewards of his terrible experiments with Life and Death?

This terrifying, enthralling series by the great Lovecraft will run on from time to time—as space permits—in future issues of WEIRD TALES!

Watch For It!

have made. There were some strange garments in the room, but West upon regaining consciousness said they did not belong to the stranger, but were specimens collected for bacteriological analysis in the course of investigations on the transmission of germ diseases. He ordered them burnt as soon as possible in the capacious fireplace. To the police we both declared ignorance of our late companion's identity. He was, West nervously said, a congenial stranger whom we had met at some downtown bar of uncertain location. We had all been rather jovial, and West and I did not wish to have our pugnacious companion hunted down.

That same night saw the beginning of the second Arkham horror — the horror that to me eclipsed the plague itself. Christ Church Cemetery was the scene of a terrible killing; a watchman having been clawed to death in a manner not only too hideous for description, but raising a doubt as to the human agency of the deed. The victim had been seen alive considerably after midnight—the dawn revealed the unutterable thing. The manager of a circus at the neighboring town of Bolton was questioned, but he swore that no beast had at any time escaped from its cage. Those who found the body noted a trail of blood leading to the receiving tomb, where a small pool of red lay on the concrete just outside the gate. A fainter trail led away toward the woods, but it soon gave out.

The next night devils danced on the roofs of Arkham, and unnatural madness howled in the wind. Through the fevered town had crept a curse which some said was greater than the plague, and which some whispered was the embodied demon-soul of the plague itself. Eight houses were entered by a nameless thing which strewed red death in its wake—in all, seventeen maimed and shapeless remnants of bodies were left behind by the voiceless, sadistic monster that crept abroad. A few persons had half seen it in the dark, and said it was white and like a malformed ape or anthropomorphic fiend. It had not left behind quite all that it had attacked, for sometimes it had been hungry. The number it had killed was fourteen; three of the bodies had been in stricken homes and had not been alive.

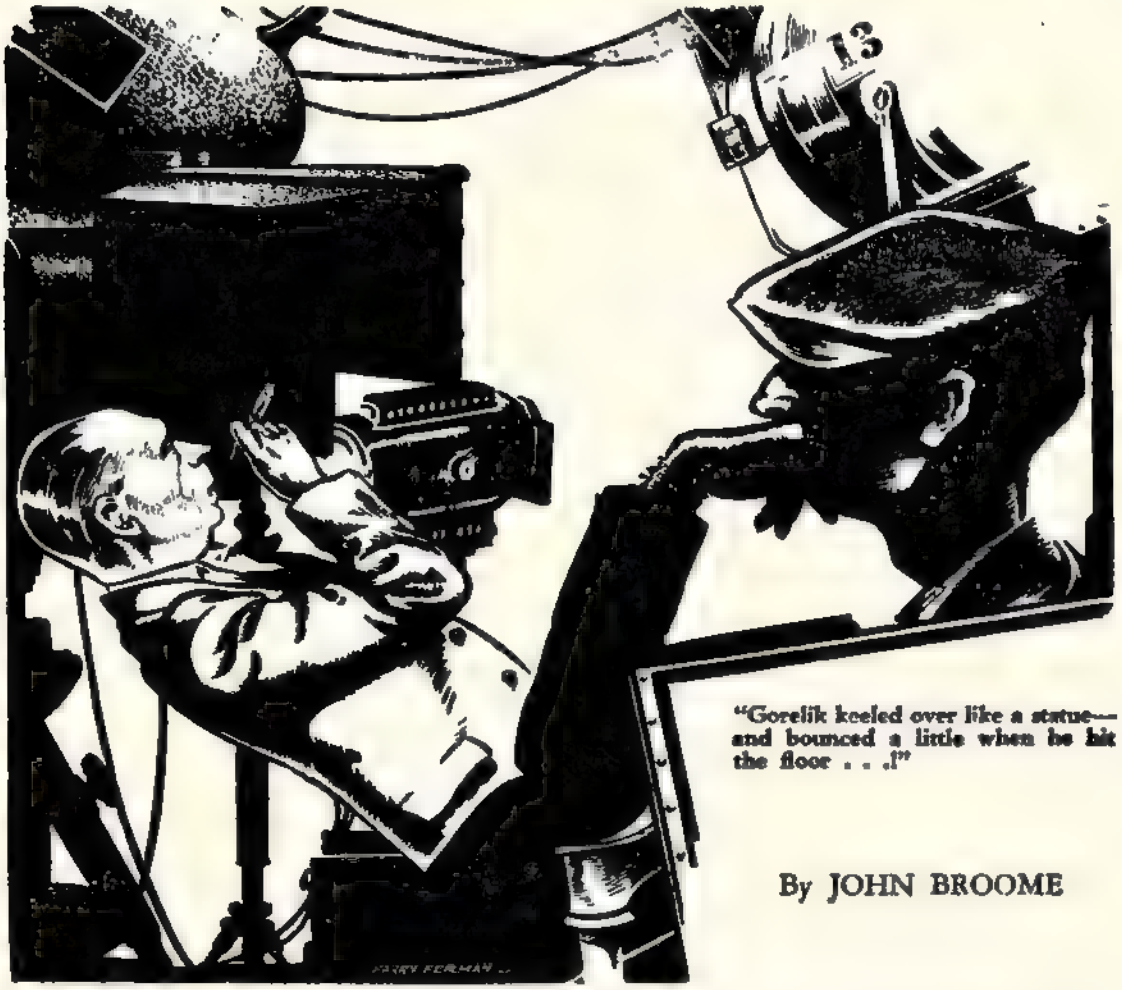
On the third night frantic bands of searchers, led by the police, captured it in a house on Crane Street near the Miskatonic campus. They had organized the quest with care, keeping in touch by means of volunteer telephone stations, and when someone in the college district had reported hearing a scratching at a shuttered window, the net was quickly spread. On account of the general alarm and precautions, there were only two more victims, and the capture was effected without major casualties. The thing was finally stopped by a bullet, though not a fatal one, and was rushed to the local hospital amidst universal excitement and loathing.

For it had been a man. This much was clear despite the nauseous eyes, the voiceless simianism, and the demoniac savagery. They dressed its wound and carted it to the asylum and Sefton, where it beat its head against the walls of a padded cell for sixteen years—until the recent mishap, when it escaped under circumstances that few like to mention. What had most disgusted the searchers of Arkham was the thing they noticed when the monster's face was cleaned—the mocking, unbelievable resemblance to a learned and self-sacrificing martyr who had been entombed but three days before—the late Dr. Allan Halsey, public benefactor and dean of the medical school of Miskatonic University.

To the vanished Herbert West and to me the disgust and horror were supreme. I shudder tonight as I think of it; shudder even more than I did that morning when West muttered through his bandages:

"Damn it, it wasn't *quite* fresh enough!"

The Redoubtable Horace Goppendyke



"Gorelik keeled over like a statue—and bounced a little when he hit the floor . . ."

By JOHN BROOME

THE whole Goppendyke business commenced last summer when I stepped into a Broadway movie to dodge the heat. I remember slinking along the street under a sun that gave me a bitter insight into the fate of parboiled lobsters, when I spotted the icicles—real icicles hanging from the Aurora's marquee.

I had an appointment, but the next thing I knew I was purchasing a ducat. It must have been a pure reflex action after those icicles dripped on my nose. And in the lobby I saw that I was about to witness a new Super-vehicle starring Hoby Revere, the celluloid swain of America. Which was all right by me; I was in the mood

for a nap. Handsome Hoby, incidentally, may mean a lot to the womenfolk of America, but to me he signifies only two things. One, the fifty slugs I connect with every Saturday for being his press agent; and two, the Revere pictures are a sure cure for my insomnia. The theatre was nice and cool. I took a rear seat and settled back comfortably—my client's Super was just coming on.

I don't know how long I snoozed, but when I woke up it was with the firm conviction that someone had locked me in a refrigerator and then dumped the whole thing into an igloo. I was positively vibrating with cold. My teeth were clattering like a pair of castenets in the hands of a St. Vitus dancer.

And the theatre around me was so empty I thought for a minute I was back in my office.

I got up a little scared and started to make a bee-line for the nearest exit—when I noticed that someone was sitting way down front.

It gave me a turn. It didn't seem natural for anyone to sit quiet like that in a temperature that would make a sea-lion beat its flippers. The chump was either sleeping or dead, I figured, and either way he was out of misery. But the Susan Anthony in me conquered, and I galloped down the aisle, threshing my arms to start circulation as I ran.

"Hey, y-you!" I yelled when I got near Hoby Revere's solitary audience. "W-wake up! There's something gaflooey with the air-cooling system here. Y-you'll—"

The audience turned his head, and I got a distinct shock. First off, he was just a kid, hardly twenty-one, with the largest, most melancholy cow-eyes I ever saw, and a corsage of tow on his bean that would have copped a prize at an Iowa corn show. Second, he hadn't been sleeping, and he certainly wasn't dead.

"Hello," I said uneasily, my teeth chattering like a machine-gun, "ain't you—I—let's say a little chilly?"

The kid shook his head without cracking a smile. His face was long and lean, and he looked hungry. Like a hungry horse, I decided.

"I ain't cold, Mister," he said sorta mournfully in a twangy drawl.

"Y-you ain't!" I shot him my most withering glance. "Then you better see a doctor quick!"

My remark passed way over the tow. The kid simply shook his horsey face and repeated his first crack. A nut, I figgered, and I'm stuck with him! I began to jump up and down to keep warm. It was colder down in front—if it wasn't zero, the difference was negligible.

"Come on, kid," I cajoled. "Don't be stubborn; they'll have to carry you out of here in a sitting position if you don't move."

Just then a little fat man in a vest came running down the aisle toward us. I recognized Sam Kirby, the Aurora's manager, with whom I had had some dealings in the past.

"Hel-l-lo, Sam," I greeted him, "when did you go into the ice business?"

BUT Kirby ignored me. He turned to the kid in the seat, and it was clear he was pretty mad about something.

"You!" he said angrily, before his teeth began to beat tattoo on each other. "Y-you're f-fired!"

The kid's cow-eyes gave Sam a hurt look.

"But Mr. Kirby," he said, "I ain't done nothin'."

"Y-you ain't done nothing!" Sam almost groaned. "You drove out all my customers—eighty-seven dollars I had to give back! And y-you call that nothing?"

"I jest couldn' help it this time, Mr. Kirby," the kid pleaded. "It won't happen again."

Sam shook his head violently; he was threshing his arms like a little windmill now.

"And on top of everything," he yelled, "y-you'll give me pn-neumonia y-yet! Get out of my theatre before I c-call the police!"

The kid looked very despondent-like as he unhinged a long, lanky frame from his seat. He slouched up the aisle without another word. Sam and I followed him into the lobby and watched him disappear outside as we began to thaw out.

"Sam," I said flatly, "what's this all about?"

The preceding conversation had not only left me at the post; it had kicked dirt all over my phizz. And I didn't like it. Kirby gave me a funny suspicious look; then he shrugged.

"I'll tell you, Keller," he said. "Why not? Horace Goppendyke ain't worth—"

"Who?"

"Horace Goppendyke," Sam repeated. "That's the kid's name. He—he can make it cold, Keller. Don't ask me how, I dunno. He's been working in the Aurora since hot weather began. He made the theatre nice and cool for ten dollars a week. But this week we started Hoby Revere's new picture, and three days running he gives me sub-zero weather! I ask you, Keller, what good is a cooling system you can't control?"

My first reaction was that I was being taken for a 42nd Street sleigh-ride; my second, that I was still asleep and Hoby's voice was giving me a nightmare. But I was still too cold to be sleeping, so the first won out. You gotta be careful on Broadway; being a fall-guy once can ruin a press agent's career.

"My dear friend, Kirby," I said, donning my chapeau, "tell it to the Weather Bureau. Doubtless they have a pigeon-hole for such items. As for me, I bid you a fond good-day."

"All right," Sam grunted as I departed, "so you don't believe. What do I care?"

THERE was something sincere about Kirby's act that bothered me for awhile. But during the next few months I forgot about the whole business, because I developed troubles of my own. I had my hands full with that handsome hulk, Hoby Revere, who was threatening to cut me off his payroll.

You see, I engineered the stunt romance between Hoby and Chichi Gelez, the Argentine tamale. The only difficulty being that Chichi didn't know it was a stunt romance. And I was supposed to let her in on it. Simple, eh? Except for the fact that the gorgeous Gelez was known to be murderous with all sorts of crockery and hardware at every distance up to a hundred yards. And my hospitalization wasn't paid up.

I took an amble in Central Park to air my gray matter and figure a way out of the mess. It was December and snow was a foot high on the ground. But I saw one bench that looked recently cleaned. There was a hobo lying out on it, but I squatted in between his feet and the bench rail.

After a moment, the hobo sat up and I saw that it was nobody but Sam Kirby's air-cooling system in person. The kid looked as unhappy as an Eskimo in the torrid zone, but I wasn't forgiving him so quickly for the gag he had helped pull on me.

"Well, well," I said smugly, "this is what comes from not taking up a trade. You oughta know that air-cooling is only a seasonal job at best."

The kid's big cow eyes gave me a hurt look that made me feel like a deep-dyed villain.

"Seriously," I said, "what did Sam give you for that stunt in the Aurora? No more than a buck, if I know Kirby."

The kid shook his long head. He looked

more than ever like a melancholy horse.

"'Twarn't no stunt, Mister," he said simply.

I started to sigh impatiently when I noticed that my left hand was automatically loosening my shirt collar. I was warm. Warm in December, with snow a foot high around me! It gave me a sudden case of goose-pimples. I shot a quick glance at the kid to see if I was being tricked again. But his long face was as solid and honest as a tub of butter.

"Listen," I said trying not to make queer noises, "are you telling me that you really made the Aurora cold last summer?"

"Yeh," he said laconically.

"And," I poked around the bench with a finger, "you—you're making it warm around here now?"

"That's right, Mister."

I swallowed a big hunk of air.

"Wait," I said. "Don't move."

And I inched backward from the bench step by step into the snow. Sure enough the frost began to bite my ears. I moved closer to the kid and it got warmer. I repeated the maneuver several times with the same result. My scalp began to tingle. I made a last attempt to uncover something phoney, and ran my hands over his frame looking for a battery-heater. Somehow I knew I wouldn't feel anything but bones—and I didn't."

"Listen, Horace," I said weakly, plopping down beside him, "that's your name isn't it, Horace Goppendyke?"

"Yep," the kid said. He was watching my antics suspiciously. "But back home in Ashepewa folks called me Slim."

"I should think they would," I said. "Well, listen Slim, where're you stopping?"

He got a little red and began to stutter, so I caught on.

"Okay, Slim," I said. "You're staying with me. I got a cot in my flat that's got this bench beat six ways."

He started to protest, but I cut him short and took him up to my place. I was already feeling a little guilty about the dough I stood to make as his agent. Though as yet I couldn't think of a spot for him. Meanwhile we got to know each other.

Goppendyke turned out to be a mighty handy man to have around the house. He could put ice cubes in my highballs simply by wrapping his paw around the glass. And he boiled my morning eggs by popping them for a second or two into his mouth.

I learned all about him too, which wasn't much. He was a farmer in Ashepewa which, it turned out, was in Vermont. And a one-sided love affair had made him leave home for the big city to make his fortune. The frail's name was Syrene Duggin, and a sweet thing from his description.

"I didn't have no chance with Syrene, Mr. Keller," Goppendyke said miserably. "She's crazy about that movie actor, Hoby Revere. She wouldn't even look at the little tricks I used to do for her."

"Ah," I said, "handsome Hoby again, eh?"

"Do you know him, Mr. Keller?" Goppendyke asked anxiously.

I nodded briefly.

"What kind of a feller is he, Mr. Keller? I mean is he worthy of the love of a girl like Syrene?"

I winced a little at the way he put it.

"No, Slim," I said. "Even Hoby's mother is reported by usually reliable sources to have suspended relations with him."

"I knew it," Goppendyke said grimly. "A cad, eh?"

His long horse-phizz tightened up as if he were concentrating. And suddenly a wave of frigid ozone socked me amidships. I shivered and began to back away.

"Hey!" I yelled. "Stop it, Slim! What're you doing?"

He came to with a start and shook himself. A second later all was warm and comfy again in my draughty duplex.

"I can't help it, Mr. Keller," Goppendyke apologized humbly. "Thinkin' of that Revere feller gets me mad, and when I get mad I jest get colder and colder. . . ."

"Sure, Slim," I said hastily, "I know how you feel. But for my sake try to control yourself. I'm allergic to sudden changes in climate."

He shook his head sadly.

"If only, Mr. Keller," he said, "you could tell Syrene what kind of a man this Revere is." Then he shook his head again. "But she'd never believe you!"

I murmured something encouraging, but an idea was forming in my think-box. This kid wouldn't look bad at all in a soup-and-fish. He was the Gary Cooper type to begin with. So why not introduce him to the Gelez mama? She went for the lean longies; and anyway Slim's unique talents ought to distract her from Hoby Revere. It was worth a chance.

"Listen, Slim," I said, "what you need is to forget Syrene for awhile. You need to become a man of the world and go out with other women. Now how would you like a knockdown to Chichi Gelez?"

He sort of blinked at that.

"I reckon I would, Mr. Keller," he said. "She's a mighty nice girl, ain't she?"

"Yeh, Slim," I said non-committally, "mighty."

SO THE meeting was arranged. Chichi was in town for a personal showing and I brought Goppendyke up to her Waldorf suite. Slim's Adam's apple did a triple-gainor when I introduced the Gelez.

The gaucho's girl-friend was clad in a one-piece diving affair that looked as if she had been poured into it without a drop to spare.

But Goppendyke soon loosened up. He froze the water in her gold-fish bowl, which gave Chichi a big kick. Then he heated her bath by simply sticking his finger into the water. The tamale couldn't contain her delight.

"Oh, Sleem," she cried, "you are wonder-ful!"

And she gave Goppy a big hug. The draft of super-heated air that came from Slim as Chichi's hooks went around him should have warned me that something was up. But I was too blissful thinking about those fifty-dollar checks to notice.

Anyway, Chichi took Slim under her wing after that, and the two started to go places together. He didn't seem to mind. And neither did I because it was good publicity for him. Though as yet, I must admit, I didn't see exactly where the publicity was getting us.

The trouble was that the general public regarded Goppy as a sort of minor Houdini with a new bag of tricks. I wanted to set them right, but I didn't know just how to go about it. The first break came when Chichi, Slim and I were chowing up one afternoon in Louie's Gold Room on the main stem.

Goppy had just finished turning our cups of steaming java into iced-coffee when a pompous little man with big gold specs bounced over to our table.

"Aha!" the little gee glared straight at Slim, "I have heard of you, Mr. Goppendyke. Allow me to state that you are nothing but a cheap faker!"

Slim gulped and turned to me in surprise. I raised my eyebrows very high at the fat little gent.

"Why don't you," I said caustically, "go peddle your afternoon editions somewhere else. We, as you can see, are busy."

The little gent got more excited. He began to sway a little and I saw he was somewhat piffled.

"Sir," he yelled thickly, "I am Professor Steinberg of the Gould Institute! And I

will stake my reputation that this Goppendyke person is nothing but hoax!"

I perked up when he mentioned his name. Steinberg was internationally known in things like sun-spots and such. An idea began to tickle my cranium, but I kept calm.

"How," I said, "do you propose to prove that, Professor?"

"Very easily," he leered at me, "if you will accompany me to my laboratory."

By this time there was a little crowd around our table and I recognized one or two reporters looking on interestedly.

"Professor," I said, "you're on. Lead the way."

The Gould Institute was practically around the corner but by the time we got there every New York sheet had a man on the job, a fact I noticed happily. Steinberg took Slim into a glass-enclosed room and the rest of us watched outside.

For almost an hour the Professor gave Goppy the works. He tested him with instruments that made the whole thing look like a Frankenstein picture. He made corkscrew lights give off fireworks and noted things on charts. Then, slowly, he came out of the room. I noticed one thing right away: the Professor was cold sober.

"Well?" I grinned triumphantly. "Is or is not Horace Goppendyke the real McCoy, Professor?"

The Professor had a vacuous expression in his eyes as he looked at me.

"The real McCoy?" he muttered blankly. "Yes, yes. He—he's more than that. He's a human cyclotron!"

The reporters got busy with their pencils.

I said, "Come again, Professor."

Steinberg made a desperate attempt to gather his faculties. It was clear he would never be the same man again.

"A cyclotron," he explained, "is an atom-smasher. Horace Goppendyke, by a process I cannot understand, is a human atom-smasher. When he breaks up atoms, he gives off heat; when he unites them, he draws heat from surrounding objects. It's very simple—but very unique."

With that Steinberg executed a sudden belly-whopper. I guess the strain of meeting one of those cyclo-businesses face to face was too much for him. Slim and I used the excitement to make our getaway. We ducked into my apartment and sat tight to await developments.

Sure enough, inside twenty-four hours my duplex looked like Broadway during the Lindbergh parade. Only instead of ticker-tape we had contracts, gobs of them. We waded through a few hundred before I picked out the best offer. It was from Gorelik Brothers Studio and it named a very handsome figure for one picture.

I wired acceptance and Slim and I T. W. A.'d out to Hollywood the next day. I was as happy to get the kid far away from Chichi Gelez as I was to sink my fangs into real dough. The two of them had been getting much too *intime* for my taste.

In Hollywood, Maurice Gorelik himself showed me the scenario they had worked out for Slim. It was a knockout. One of these historical dramas, with twists. Slim is a simple soldier in the Revolutionary War. His first big scene comes when the army retreats to Valley Forge. Slim by superhuman efforts keeps the soldiers warm during the winter.

Then he thaws ice off the ground and plants vegetables to feed his hungry comrades. The audience is supposed to be all with him already, but the last scene is designed to keel them over. The battle is all but lost, and the Americans have to get across the Delaware which is a solid mass of ice chunks. The Red-coats are only a mile away and it looks like curtains for our side.

Well, Slim takes a stand on the shore and sends out a barrage of heat waves—which are tinted red on the screen—and

melts the whole river! The soldiers jump into boats and row across, leaving the Redcoats fuming on the bank!

"It's colossal!" I said to Maurice Gorelik.

"Even better than that," Maurice said in his simple way as we parted.

WELL, *Soldier of Fortune,* as the film was titled, got off to a flying start. Slim made a big hit with everyone. He was good-natured as usual, and always willing to do tricks for people. Once, on location he froze a small lake just to keep in practice for his big scene, and the entire cast went ice-skating in their bathing suits.

The cast made a sort of pet of Slim after that. But it wasn't that which got me worried. I knew Slim wasn't the type to change hat-sizes. Outside his human ammonia-and-brine plant, he was still a simple farmer-boy from Ashepewa.

But it was the aforementioned Chichi Gelez who was now wrinkling up my face-leather. The tamale had finagled her way into a lead role in *Soldier of Fortune;* and she was keeping Slim so busy going places with her that I hardly saw him anymore. Which I didn't like a-tall.

So I waylaid him one day outside the studio. There were tiny puffs under the Goppendyke eyes which weren't entirely due to greasepaint. And the wide-open prairie-look was almost all gone.

"Hello, Slim," I said, "still icing champagne for Chichi in the hot spots, eh?"

He grinned a little sheepishly.

"Yeh," he said. "Gee, Mr. Keller, she's wonderful. I never figered a girl like Miss Gelez could ever like a plain feller like me!"

"No?" I snapped. "Well, it ain't no prize-winning mystery to me!"

"How's that?" he muttered, puzzled.

"Listen, Slim," I pleaded, "don't you think it's about time you stopped giving Chichi the old cow-catcher act? Don't you see the dame is after the publicity. That's why she gave you a tumble in the first place back in New—"

I stopped short as an ominous cold wave originating from my lanky client struck me full-blast.

"All right, all right," I grumbled. "I don't know nothing. I'm just the bad guy who wants to break up the happy couple. Give me a mustache to sneer through!"

The climate around me moderated.

"Listen, Mr. Keller," Slim said earnestly. "I've been meaning to tell you. Miss Gelez and me are gonna get married soon as my picture's over. I jest thought you'd like to be the first to know about it."

So the Gelez has worked that fast! Mentally, I was a seething volcano of foul curses, but I just stuck out my hand.

"Sure, Slim," I muttered, "good luck and all that."

Goppendyke gave me a 100 Centigrade palm, so I knew we were parting friends. But I felt worse than when I had three front teeth yanked. Feeding martyrs to the lions was an act of mercy compared with delivering Slim over to Chichi. The tamale had already run through six swains in her short career.

All that night I tramped my parquet, with no more result than to do a good job of flattening my arches. The fact that I was the idiot who brought Slim and the Gelez together only added to my misery. There didn't seem to be anything I could do to avert the calamity either.

Morning came and I just about gave up hope. The big scene in *Soldier of Fortune* was scheduled to be shot that day; and by night Slim would be slipping a ring on Chichi's finger. I was massaging my aching tootsies and thinking desperate thoughts, when a timid knock fell on my door.

I opened it, and a trim little vision stood before me. It was a girl with a milk-maid's

complexion and a lot of golden curls that made her look as if she had stepped right out of a fairy-tale. I squinted for a minute.

"Don't tell me," I said suddenly. "Syrene Duggin from Ashepewa!"

The vision nodded shyly.

"You're Mr. Keller, aren't you?" she said. "Horace's manager?"

I pleaded guilty and invited her in. We sat in my living-room and fell to conversation. It turned out that Syrene wanted Slim back; she loved him and her former infatuation with Hoby Revere wasn't even a pleasant memory. Naturally, I was a little suspicious, seeing how she had refused Slim when he was nobody.

"Tell me, Mr. Keller," Syrene pleaded, "am I too late? I mean has Horace fallen in love with someone else? If he has I'll go away. But I do love him, Mr. Keller. You must believe me!"

I gazed into her baby blue eyes and I had to believe her. This was the real thing all right. I had been around too long not to recognize it. But all I could do was sit there miserably and realize that I was the skunk who had indirectly ruined the lives of this girl and Slim.

"I don't know, Miss Duggin," I began lamely. "That is—"

I stopped. Suddenly the glimmer of an idea came to me and I realized that maybe my arches had not fallen in vain.

"You just make yourself at home here, Miss Duggin," I said. "There's something I must attend to."

SYRENE promised to stay put until she heard from me, and I got to work right away. The first item was to get Hoby Revere on the phone and make a date to meet him outside Slim's set. That was easy. I simply told Hoby that a girl's club from Paducah wanted his autograph for framing in their clubhouse. He sounded more squiffed than usual, so I sent a car to pick him up. Then I hopped into a cab myself and beat it down to the studio.

Hoby met me at the studio gate. America's ace hero was clad in a natty morning outfit, and he smelled like a Kentucky still. As soon as he got my pan in focus, Revere demanded the whereabouts of the girls' club. I told him they'd show up soon, and led him into the *Soldier of Fortune* set.

If all went well, my hours as Hoby Revere's agent were numbered. But it seemed like a small price to pay for Slim's happiness. The day's shooting hadn't yet begun when we entered. The principals and a flock of extras were standing around waiting for orders. Slim was in a corner making rum-colas for the cast. I maneuvered Hoby in his direction.

"Hello, Slim," I piped when we got close. "I want you to meet a friend of mine."

Slim glanced up with a grin. But when he spotted Hoby Revere, the grin disappeared. Simultaneously, the cola in the glass he was holding froze solid, shooting up an inch over the rim. I waited expectantly.

"Now," I thought, "things will happen."

But nothing else did. After a moment, Slim turned away grimly and went on mixing drinks. I felt weak, flabbergasted, My plan had been for Slim to get so mad at the sight of Hoby in the flesh that he would freeze Revere and a few other people around pretty hard. That would disrupt production, and automatically postpone the wedding. But I was wrong about Slim; the big goof had obviously been softened up by Hollywood so that he couldn't even develop a healthy hate any more!

I bestowed on the lanky figure my most contemptuous stare and guided Hoby away. What else could I do?

But just then Chichi Gelez ambled into

view, all bedecked in pink Colonial hoops and really looking like a sweet dish. She made straight for Slim and didn't notice either me or my wobbly client. But Hoby gave a start when he saw her. Before I could stop him, the egg ran over and threw his arms around Chichi.

"Darling!" Hoby cried. "I've missed you so!"

I realized that the dope had forgotten his phoney engagement to the Gelez was off! Chichi tried to break his hold, but Hoby was too pickled to pay attention to her protests.

"My darling!" he repeated in his most hammy style. And he planted a big kiss in the general vicinity of Chichi's mouth.

Everybody on the set was watching the two clinch; and a sort of cold thrill ran through me when I saw that Slim was watching too. I murmured a short prayer and braced myself. A moment later it struck.

There were a lot of people in the big studio. Two directors were there, a raft of cameramen; even three of the six Gorelik Brothers had come to watch the big scene of *Soldier of Fortune*. And it hit everyone simultaneously.

Peculiarly, the thing I remember best is that the air around me actually crackled! The sound was followed by a cold so intense that it burned. But the next thing I knew I wasn't feeling a thing. I was just standing there in the middle of the set unable to move a finger.

Everybody in the studio was standing or sitting in the exact positions they had been in when Slim turned on his barrage of anti-calories. They were frozen solid as butcher's meat! It was the ruin of Pompei over again; only this time in reverse!

"You cur!" Slim said very hoarsely. "Get yore filthy paws off Miss Gelez!"

Hoby, of course, didn't reply. He couldn't. I know because I couldn't even wiggle my tongue. Neither did Hoby let Chichi loose. That too was beyond his powers. Slim sort of growled; and with one jump reached the two. He tried to wrestle Revere away from the girl. But without success. For the time being, Hoby and Chichi came together. They were locked good!

At that moment Maurice Gorelik, who had been standing near a camera with his cigar an inch away from his mouth, keeled over like a statue and bounced a little when he hit the floor. Slim looked up a little startled at that. And suddenly, I guess, he began to realize what he had done. He stepped back and looked scared. We all must have looked like some screwy tableau.

I wanted to call out something to cheer Slim up; but of course I didn't. My brain was on ice for real, and everything began to go a deep but pleasant red. Just before I lost consciousness, a happy thought struck me. If Chichi Gelez married anyone in the immediate future, it would most likely by Hoby Revere!

WHEN I came to, I was lying flat on my back and I was dressed in a white nightgown. The ceiling above me was white and there was even a white uniform standing next to my bed. But I didn't ask whether I was in heaven because I'm no fall-guy.

I simply asked the white uniform what day it was.

"Thursday," she smiled at me.

I smiled back.

"No, dearest," I said. "I mean the date."

"August twenty-third," she said.

I blinked at that. It had been August fifth when I had paid that memorable visit to *Soldier of Fortune*. I had been out for more than two weeks!

"Get me newspapers," I said. "As many as you can find for the month of August."

The white uniform brought me a whole

batch. I went through them quickly. The first item that caught my eye was a statement in *Film and Review* to the effect that *Soldier of Fortune* had discontinued production by reason of the sudden incapacitation of the entire cast. So far so good! I hunted further.

The next thing was a signed interview given by Miss Chichi Gelez to the Intercoast Syndicate reporter.

"Horace Goppendyke," Chichi told the Intercoast man, *"was nothing but a scoundrel. He ruined our picture and almost succeeded in cutting short my career. I am lucky to have found out his true nature in time. You may say that my lawyers are suing Mr. Goppendyke for $100,000 for physical injuries and mental strain!"*

Still good! I would carry that suit up to the Supreme Court and show that Chichi herself was to blame for the whole thing! But what I wanted was news of Slim. I wanted to know if he had found Syrene Duggin, and whether they had become reconciled.

But there wasn't a whisper about Goppendyke in any of the papers.

It took me two weeks to get out of that hospital. It turned out I had pleurisy—with complications. I was lucky at that. Hoby Revere was laid up with lobar pneumonia and intestinal grippe—he was good for almost six months between sheets. Maurice Gorelik developed rheumatism and a bad case of the flu. Chichi was the only one who got off light. A slight head cold. She was tough, that Gelez!

Two weeks later I was back at my apartment, using a cane. There was a note. As I read it my eyes began to get wet. I put that down to the pleurisy.

"Deer Mr. Keller," it said, *"Syrene has told me all you have done for us, and I wanta say that you are the only true friend I ever had. I've caused you a peck of truble and made a mess out of everything I gess, becuz I couldn't control myself. But I'm happy for one thing. Syrene and me are together agen, and we are going away to be married. I won't never have nothin to do with pitchers agen. Sinserely yours, Slim.*

It was a week before I could navigate without props; and another one before I could dig up bus-fare back east. I was happy for Slim and Syrene, but I didn't fancy his last crack about quitting pictures. Why, I had it all figured out for Slim to make a bang-up comeback in a new thriller

I blew into Ashepewa at the end of September. It was a wee town and I located Slim pretty easy. A villager pointed out a pretty red-brick cottage off the main road. I ambled up and saw a familiar lanky figure pitching hay.

"Hi, Slim!" I yelled.

"Why, Mr. Keller!" he yelled back, and pumped my hand like he was trying to make water come from my nose. "I'm sure glad to see you!"

"Me, too," I said. "You see, Slim, I got a new picture all figured out for you. It's terrific!"

His face screws up.

"I'm awful sorry, Mr. Keller, but even if I wanted to go back in pitchers, I couldn't. You see, I ain't no cyclowatchamacallit any more."

"You ain't?" I could feel my face getting pasty.

"Naw," he said and a blush spreads over his pan. "You see, Mr. Keller, I hadn't ever kissed Syrene before that time I found here in yore apartment. Well, she threw her arms around me, and I knew somethin' was happening becuz I never did feel so warm before! Syrene had to move into the next room to keep from gettin' burned. And a second later somethin' inside me went *pop*. After that I couldn't ever make it hot or cold agin."

He paused and grinned at me.

"I reckon you might say, Mr. Keller, that I jest naturally blew my fuse!"

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IT HAD been a day of strange weather, a day the calendar declared to be late April and the thermometer proclaimed to be March or November. From dawn till early dark the rain had spattered down, chill, persistent, deceptive, making it feel many degrees colder than it really was, but just at sunset it had cleared and a sort of angry yellow half-light had spilled from a sky of streaky black against a bank of blood-red clouds. Now, while the dying wind was groping with chill-stiffened fingers at the window-casings, a fire blazed on the study hearth, its comforting rose glow a gleaming island in the gathering shadows, its reflection daubing ever-changing patterns on the walls and tightly-drawn curtains.

"On such a night," the Bishop quoted inexactly as he helped himself to brandy, "mine enemy's dog, though he had bit me, I would not turn away from my door."

Dr. Bentley, rector of St. Chrysostom's, dropped a second lump of sugar in his coffee and said nothing. He knew the Bishop, and had known him since their student days. When he quoted Shakespeare he was really searching through the lumber rooms of memory for a story, and there were few who had a better store of anecdotes than the Right Reverend Richard Chauncey, missionary, soldier, preacher and ecclesiastical executive, worldly man of God and Godly man of the world. He'd looked forward to Dick's coming down for confirmation, and had made a point of asking Kitteringson in to dinner. Kitteringson was all right, of course; good, earnest worker, a good preacher and a good churchman, but a trifle too—how should he put it?—too dogmatic. If you couldn't find it in the writings of the Fathers of the Church or the Thirty-nine Articles he was against a proposition, whatever it might be. A session with the Bishop would be good for him.

"Good stuff in the lad," thought Dr. Bentley as he studied his junior covetly. A rather strong, intelligent face he had, but marked by ascetism, the face of one who might be either an unyielding martyr or a merciless inquisitor. Now he was leaning forward almost eagerly, and the firelight did things to his earnest face—made it look like one of those old medieval monks in the old masters' paintings.

"I've been wondering all day, sir," he told Bishop Chauncey, "what you meant when you told the confirmation class they should use common sense about religious prejudices. Surely, there may be no compromise with evil—"

"I shouldn't care to lay that down as a precept," the Bishop answered with a low chuckle. "We're told the devil can quote Scripture for his purposes; why shouldn't Christians make use of the powers of darkness in a proper case?"

Young Dr. Kitteringson was aghast. "Make use of Satan?" he faltered. "Have dealings with the arch-fiend—"

"Precisely, son. Shakespeare might have

Cruelty and ignorance — hatred and superstition — these had put the finger on her. She was doomed. . . . There was only one way out — only one Power to appeal to!

been more truthful than poetical when he declared the Prince of Darkness is a gentleman."

"I can't conceive of such a thing!" the younger man retorted. "All our experiences tell us—"

"All?" cut in Bishop Chauncey softly, and the young rector fell hesitant before the level irony of his gaze. "How old are you, son?"

"Thirty-two, sir, but I've read the writings of the Fathers of the Early Church, and one and all they tell us that to compromise with evil is a sin against—" He stopped, a little abashed at the look of tolerant amusement on his senior's face, then: "Can you name even one case when compromise with evil didn't end disastrously for all concerned, sir?" he challenged.

"Yes, I think I can," the Bishop passed the brandy sniffer back and forth beneath his nostrils, inhaled the bouquet of the old cognac appreciatively, then took a delicate, approving sip. "I think I can, son. Like you, I have to call upon my reading to sustain me, but unlike you I can't claim ecclesiastical authority for my writers. One of them, indeed, was an ancestor of mine, a great-grandfather several times removed."

The gloom that waited just beyond the moving edge of firelight seemed flowing forward, like a slowly rising, stagnant tide, and a blazing ember falling to the layer of sand beneath the burning logs sent a sudden shaft of light across the intervening shade, casting a quick shadow of the Bishop on the farther wall. An odd shadow it was, not like the rubicund, gray-haired churchman, but queerly elongated and distorted, so that it appeared to be the shade of a lean man with gaunt and predatory features, muffled in a cloak and leaning forward at the shoulders, like one intent —almost in the act of pouncing.

Kundre Maltby (said the Bishop, drawing thoughtfully at his cigar so its recurrent glow etched his face in alternate red highlight and black shadow) was a confessed witch, and witches, as you know, are those who have made solemn compact with the Evil One.

She was a Swedish girl—at least she claimed that she was Swedish—whom Captain Pelatiah Maltby had found somewhere in his travels, married, and brought back to Danby. Who she really was nobody knew.

CAPTAIN MALTBY'S ship, the *Bountiful Adventure*, came on her Easter Monday morning, clinging to a hatch-grating some twenty miles or so off the Madeira coast. He'd cleared from Funchal the night before, swearing that he'd never make the port again, for the Portuguese had celebrated Easter with an *auto da fé* at which a hundred condemned witches had been burned, and the sight of the poor wretches' sufferings sickened him. When he asked the castaway her name she told him it was Kundre, and said her ship had been the *Blenkinge* of Stockholm, wrecked three days before.

Maltby marveled at this information, for he had been in the Madeiras for a whole week, and there had been no storm, not even a light squall. But there the girl was, lashed to the floating hatch-top, virtually nude and all but dead with thirst and starvation. Moreover, she had very winning ways and more than a fair share of beauty, so Captain Maltby asked no further questions, but put in at New York and married her before he brought the *Bountiful Adventure* up the coast to Danby.

Their life together seems to have been ideal, possibly idyllic. He was a raw-boned, tough-thewed son of New England, hard as flint outside and practical as the multiplication tables within. But it was from such ancestry that Whittier and Holmes and Bryant and Longfellow sprang, and probably beneath his workaday ex-

terior Pelatiah Maltby had a poet's soul. They had twin children, a boy and a girl. At Pelatiah's insistence the girl was named for her mother, but Kundre chose the name of Micah for the boy, for in the whole Scripture she liked best that Prophet's question, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

She took to transplantation like a hardy flower, and grew and flourished on New England soil. From all accounts she must have been a beauty in a heavy Nordic way, a true woman of the sea. Full six feet tall she was, and strong as any man, yet with all the gracious curves of womanhood. Her hair, they say, was golden. Not merely yellow, but that metallic shade of gold which, catching glints of outside light, seems to hold a light of its own. And her skin was white as sea-foam, and her eyes the bright blue-green of the ice of the fjords, and her lips were red as sunset on the ocean when a storm has blown itself away.

Prosperity came with her, too. The winds were always favorable to Captain Maltby's ship. He made the longest voyages in the shortest time. When other ships were set upon by tempests and battered till they were mere hulks he came safely through the raving storms or missed them altogether, and his enterprises always prospered. Foreign traders sold him goods at laughably low prices, or bought the cargoes that he brought at prices that astonished him.

He brought back treasures from the far corners of the earth, silks from Cathay and Nippon, carved coral from the South Sea Isles, pearls from Java, diamonds from Africa, a comb of solid beaten gold from India—and the golden comb seemed pallid when she drew it through the golden spate of her loosed golden hair.

The neighbors were first amazed, then wondering, finally suspicious. Experience had taught them Providence dealt even-handedly with men and balanced its smiles with its frowns. Yet Pelatiah Maltby always won. He never had to drain a cup of vinegar to compensate him for the many heady cups of the wine of success he quaffed.

It was Captain Joel Newton who brought matters to a head. He and Captain Maltby had been rivals many years. His pew was just across the aisle from Maltby's in the meeting house, his wife sat where she could not help but see the worldly gewgaws Maltby lavished on Kundre, and Abigail Newton't tongue had an edge like that of a new-filed adz, and her jealousy the bitter bite of acid. Joel Newton heard himself compared to Pelatiah Maltby, with small advantage, every Lord's Day after service, and, driven by the lash of a shrew's tongue, he determined to find the key to Maltby's constant success, and set himself deliberately to trail the *Bountiful Adventure* from one port to another.

Not that it helped him. The *Bountiful Adventure* outsailed him every trip, and when he came into a foreign berth he found that Maltby had been there before him, secured what trade there was, and sailed away.

They came face to face at last at Tamatave in Madagascar. Maltby had traded rum and salted fish and tobacco for a holdful of rich native silver, and the local traders had no thought of laying in new stocks for months. Newton's ship was loaded to capacity with just the wares that Maltby had disposed of so profitably, there was no market for his cargo, his food was running low, and ruin stared him in the face.

Both had taken more of the French wines the inn purveyed than was their custom. Maltby was flushed with success, Newton bitter with the mordancy of disappointment. "Had I a witch-woman for wife I'd always fare well, too," he told his rival.

"How quotha?" Maltby asked. "What meanest, knave? My Kundre is the fairest, sweetest bloom—"

"As ever sank its taproots deep in hell," his rival finished for him, "Oh, don't 'ee think to fool us, Neighbor Maltby! We know what 'tis that always sends the fair winds at thy tail when others lie becalmed. We know what 'tis that makes the heathen take thy wares at such great prices, and pay thee ten times what thou'd hoped to get. Aye, and we know whence comes thy witch-mate, too—how the Papishers had burned a drove of warlocks in the Madeiras the day before ye found her floating in the ocean. She said her vessel had been wrecked three days before, but had there been a storm? Thou knowest well there had not. Did'st offer her free passage back to the islands, and did she take thy offer kindly?"

Now this was a poser, for Pelatiah had offered to set Kundre on shore at Funchal when he rescued her, and she had refused tearfully, and begged him to hold to his course.

"And why?" asked Captain Newton as he warmed to his task of denunciation. "I'll tell 'ee why, my fine bucko—because she was a cursed witch who'd slipped between the Papists' fingers and made use of thee to ferry her to safety. Thinkest thou she loves thee? Faugh! While thou'rt away she wantons it with every man 'twixt Danby and old Salem Town—"

"Thou liar!" The scandalous words were like to have been Joel's last, for Pelatiah drew his hanger and made for him with intent to stab the slander down his throat with cold steel, but Joel was just a thought too quick.

Before his rival reached him he jerked a pistol from his waistband and let fly, striking Captain Maltby fairly in the chest. Afterwards he boasted that it was a silver bullet he had used, since, as everybody knew, witches, warlocks and were-beasts were impervious to lead, but vulnerable to silver missiles.

However that might be Captain Maltby halted in mid-stride, and his hanger fell with a clatter from his unnerved hand. He hiccoughed once and tried to draw a breath that stopped before he had it in, sagged at the knees, fell on his side and died. But with that last unfinished breath they say he whispered, "Kundre dearest, they have done for me and will for thee if so be that they can. God have thee in His keeping—"

Maltby, of course, was a Protestant, and the only Christian cemetery in the town was Catholic. It was not possible a heretic should lie in consecrated ground, but the missionary priest took counsel with the rabbi of the little Jewish congregation and arranged to buy a grave-site in the Hebrew burying ground.

There was no ordained minister of his faith to do the final service for Maltby, so the priest and rabbi stood beside his grave, and one said Christian prayers in Latin, and the other Jewish prayers in Hebrew, while the grim-faced sailors from New England stood by and marveled at this show of charity in those they had been taught to hate, and responded with tear-choked "A-mens" when prayers were done and time had come to heap the earth upon the body sewn in sailcloth in lieu of a coffin.

IT WAS a Wednesday in mid-April when the killing took place, and Kundre, so the story goes, was sitting beside the brooklet that ran through her back-lot. The weather was unseasonably warm, and her children waded in the stream and searched for buds of ground-rose while she sunned and bleached the hair that was her greatest pride—or vanity, according to the neighbors' wives. Suddenly she raised her head like one who listens to a hail from far away, shook back her clouding hair and

cupped one hand to her ear to sit there statue-still for a long moment. Then, with a cry that seemed to be the echo of her riven heart-strings' breaking, she called out, "Pelatiah! Oh beloved!" and fell forward on her face beside the brooklet, lying with her arms outstretched before her like a diver's when he strikes the water, while her great, heroically-formed body twitched and jerked, and little, dreadful moans came bubbling from her lips, like blood that wells and bubbles from a mortal wound.

Presently she rose and dried her eyes and went into the house where she laid away her gown of crisp blue linen and put on widow's weeds before she sought Ezekiel Martin the stone-mason and ordered him to cut and set a gravestone in the village churchyard. You could see that tombstone now if you should go to Danby burying ground. It reads:

Sacred to the memory of
PELATIAH MALTBY
Chriftian man & feacaptain
Moft foully done to death by jealoufie
at Tamatave in Madagafcie

Now, you'll allow it would be cause for comment, even in these days when extra-sensory perceptions are taken as more or less established facts, for a woman to become aware of her husband's death halfway round the world from her at the very moment of its happening. The circumstances caused comment in mid-seventeenth century New England, too, but not at all of the same kind. Everybody dreaded sorcery and witchcraft then, and in every unexplained occurrence men saw Satan's ungloved hand. So when Kundre went forth in her mourning clothes, sorrowing dry-eyed at the empty grave where she had placed the tombstone, neighbors looked at her from beneath lowered lids, and when she went to divine service at the meeting house the tithing man went past her hurriedly, and hardly paused to hold the alms basin before her, though he knew it would be heavier by a gold piece minted with the symbol of King Charles' majesty when he withdrew it.

In August came the *Bountiful Adventure* with her ensign flying at half-mast, and Captain Maltby's death was confirmed by the sorrowing seamen.

But what became of Captain Joel Newton and his ship the *Crystal Wave* nobody ever knew. He had set sail from Tamatava the same day he shot Maltby, for everyone agreed he had provoked the quarrel, and the commandant of the garrison threatened his arrest unless he drew his anchor from the harbor-mud at once. The rest was silence. Neither stick nor spar nor broken bit of wreckage ever washed ashore to show the *Crystal Wave's* fate, or that of Captain Joel Newton and the twenty seamen of his crew.

Voyages of a year or even two years were the rule those days, and it was not until King Charles had been beheaded and the Lord Protectory proclaimed that Abigail Newton descended from the "widow's watch" that topped her square-roofed house beside the harbor and changed her homespun gown of blue for one of black linsey woolsey, then sent for Zeke Martin the mason to cut and set a stone in Danby churchyard.

The twenty widows of the *Crystal Wave's* crew also went in mourning, and bewailed their joint and several losses piteously. When they passed Kundre in the street they looked away, but when she'd gotten safely past they spit upon the ground and muttered "witch!" and "devil's-hag!"

Kundre was a Swedish woman, and though the good folk of Danby had small use for King James' politics and even less for his religion, they were with him to a man in his views on witchcraft. More-

over, they recalled how Scandinavian witches had raised storms and tempests to prevent the Princess Anne from reaching Scotland where her marriage to King James was to be solemnized, and some of the more learned in the village knew the legends of *Sangreal* and remembered that the temptress who all but kept the Holy Grail from Parsifal was named Kundry. There seemed little difference between her name and Kundre's. Kundry of the legend was a witch damned past redemption, might not Kundre—the strange outland woman who knew of her husband's death four months before the news came home—also be a potent witch?

It seemed entirely possible and even probable, and when the widowed Abigail met widowed Kundre in the village street and taxed her with destroying both the *Crystal Wave's* master and crew by witchcraft something happened to confirm the worst suspicions.

"Thou art a wicked, devil-vowed and wanton witch!" said Abigail in hearing of at least three neighbor women. "By thy vile arts thou raised a monstrous storm and sank the *Crystal Wave* and all her people in the ocean."

Kundre looked at her, and in her ice-blue eyes there seemed to kindle a slow light like that which the aurora borealis makes on winter nights. "Thy tongue is dipped in venom like a serpent's, Goody Newton," she replied in the deep voice which was her Nordic heritage. "It never wags except to hurt thy neighbors, so 'twere best thou never used it hereafter."

Whether from the look in Kundre's eyes, or from astonishment that anyone should dare to tell her to keep still we do not know, but it was amply attested that Abigail for once had no reply to make, and we find in the old town records of Danby that on the evening after this encounter she lost her power of speech completely. More, she lost the use of her tongue, for it swelled and swelled until she could not keep it in her mouth, and she could take no nourishment but liquids, and those with greatest difficulty.

In the light of present-day medical knowledge it would not be too difficult to attribute her misfortune to that rare condition known as macroglossia or hypertrophy of the tongue, which doctors tell us is due to engorgement and dialation of the lymph channels. Most of us who have served in hospitals have seen such cases, where the swollen tongue hangs from the mouth and gives the patient a peculiarly idiotic look. But medicine was far from an exact science those days, and besides there was the testimony of the women who had seen the curse of silence laid on Abigail. Three hours after sunset Kundre was "spoken against" as a witch and duly lodged in Danby jail.

BY THE common law of England torture was forbidden to force a prisoner to accuse himself, but by the witchcraft statutes of King James certain "tests" which differed from torture neither in degree nor kind were permitted. One of these was known as "swimming," for it was believed a witch's body was so buoyed up with evil that it could not sink in water.

Accordingly, upon the second day of her confinement Kundre was brought out to be "swum." Stripped to her shift they led her from the jail to the horse-pond which served the village as reservoir and ornamental lake at once, forced her to sit cross-legged on the ground and tied her right thumb to her left greattoe, her right great toe to her left thumb with heavy linen thread which had been waxed for greater strength, and to make it cut more deeply in the tender flesh. Then over her they dropped a linen bed-sheet, tumbled her all helpless as she was upon her side and tied the sheet's loose ends together, exactly as a modern housewife makes a

laundry bundle ready. A rope was fastened to the knotted sheet and willing hands laid hold on it and dragged it out into the water.

Now here we have a choice between the natural and the supernatural. We have all seen the properties of wet cloth to retain the air and resist water. The device known as water wings with which so many children learn to swim is simply a cloth bladder wet before inflation, and as long as outside pressure is evenly applied it will support surprisingly large weights in calm water.

Perhaps it was as natural a phenomenon as this that kept the accused woman afloat on the calm surface of the village horse-pond. Perhaps, again, it was something more sinister. At any rate, the sheeted bundle bobbed and floated on the quiet surface of the pool as easily as if it had been filled with cork, and a great shout went up from the spectators: "She swims! She swims; it is the judgment of just Heaven; she is a proven witch!"

Her trial lasted a full day, and people came from miles about to hear the evidence poured on her. Ezekiel Martin the stonemason told how she came to him and ordered him to cut the tombstone for a man whose limbs were scarcely stiff in death, though none could know that he had died until his ship came a full four months later.

There was no dearth of testimony concerning the fine winds and weather that had been her husband's portion since he married her, or concerning the storms that had plagued his rivals.

Abigail Newton stood up in court that all might see her swollen tongue, and though she could not speak, she went through an elaborate dumb-show of the way the curse had been laid on her. Less reticent, Flee-from-the-Wrath-to-Come Epsworth, Rebecca Norris and Susan Clayton told under oath how they had seen and heard Kundre strike Abigail with speechlessness.

A tithe of such evidence would have been enough to hang her, and the jury took but fifteen minutes to deliberate upon their verdict, which, of course, was guilty.

Asked what she had to say in her defense before the court pronounced sentence, she made a seemly curtsey to the judge and answered without hesitation: "'Tis true I am a witch as ye have charged me. Long years agone my sire and dam made compact with the Prince of Evil and bound me by their covenant, but never have I used my power to hurt a living creature, brute or human. That I should wish my man to prosper was but natural. Thus far I used my power over wind and tides, but no farther. Whether heaven punished Goodman Newton for the foul murder that he did on my poor man I cannot say. I know naught of the matter, nor did I lift a finger to bring heaven's retribution on him. 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' saith the Lord.

"As for the swollen tongue of yon shrew, belike it is the malice of her black and jealous heart that bloats it. As to that I cannot answer; but hark ye, neighbors, if I had the power to release her I'd not use it. The town is better for her silence, as I wis ye all agree."

With that she made another curtsey to the judge and stood there silent, waiting sentence: "Since, therefore, Goodwife Kundre Maltby hath by her own confession admitted she was justly tried and convicted, so let her on account of her bond with the Devil and on account of the witchcraft she hath practiced, be hanged by the neck until she be dead."

The usual formula in hanging cases was for the court to add, "and may God have mercy on thy soul," but such a sentiment seemed obviously out of place here, and the judge forbore to express it.

They carried out the sentence next day,

and a mighty crowd was gathered for the spectacle. The members of the trained band were much put to it to control the rabble when the hangman drove his cart beneath the gallows tree and made the hemp fast to her neck.

She wore her widow's weeds to execution, and round her neck was clasped a slender chain of some base metal with a flat pendant like a coin hung from it. It was the only ornament she'd had when Pelatiah found her floating on the grating, and she had laid it by when they were married. Now, through a whim, perhaps, she chose to wear it at her death.

They'd let her children visit her in jail the night before, and she had sent the girl back for the bauble. "Look well on it, my sweet," she told the child when it was clasped about her neck. "The time may come when thou'lt have need of it, and if it comes thou shalt not cry for it in vain."

As the hangman bound her elbows to her sides before he slipped the noose beneath her chin she begged him, "Leave the worthless chain in place when thy grim task is done, good Peter Grimes. In my left shoe thou'lt find a golden sovereign hidden to repay thee for thy work. Take it and welcome, but if thou take'st the chain and pendant from me—a witch's curse shall be on thee."

Peter Grimes was a poor man, and the clothes a felon stood in when he died were part of his perquisites, but he had no stomach for a witch's curse, so when he found the gold piece in her shoe as she had promised he took it and was well pleased to leave the worthless chain in place.

She did not die easily, from all accounts. Her splendid body was too powerful, the tide of life ran too strong in her, so she dangled, quivering and writhing in the air a full five minutes, then Peter Grimes, perhaps in charity, perhaps because he wished to have the business over with and go home to his breakfast, seized her by the legs and dragged until the double burden of his weight and hers proved too much for her spinal column, and with a snapping like the cracking of a fire-dried stick her neck broke and her struggles ended.

They raised the stone that she had set above her husband's empty grave, scooped out a shallow opening beneath it and dropped her in, coffinless and without proper graveclothes. So, as the neighbors sagely said, she had outreached herself and ordered her own tombstone when by her wicked wizardry she had the tidings of her man's death at the instant it occurred.

And here again we're forced to make a choice between the natural and the supernatural. That Kundre should have confessed she was guilty was not particularly important. We know that under heavy mental stress people will accuse themselves of almost any crime. There's hardly a sensational murder case in which the police don't have to deal with numerous entirely innocent self-accusers. That part of it is understandable.

What is more difficult to explain is that at the very moment Peter Grimes broke Kundre's neck the swelling in Abigail Newton's tongue began to subside, and by noon she had entirely regained the power of speech. Indeed, she regained it so fully that within six months she was twice sentenced to the ducking-stool for public scoldings, and finally was forced to stand before the meeting house on the Sabbath with a muzzle on her face and a paper reading "Common Scold" hung by a string around her neck.

Not the least mystifying thing about the mystery of Kundre Maltby was the way her fortune disappeared. That she and Pelatiah had been rich was common knowledge, but when the assessors went to her house to take her property in custody they could find nothing of substantial value. Not a single gold or silver coin, nor yet a

bit of jewelry could they turn up, though they searched the place from cellar to ridgepole and even knocked down several walls in quest of concealed hiding places. So, balked in the attempt to work a forfeiture of her fortune, they sold the house and land at public vendue, put the proceeds in the town treasury and farmed the children out to be taught useful trades.

Micah was apprenticed at the rope-walk owned by Goodman Richard Belkton, Kundre took her place among the sewing maids of Goodwife Deborah Stiles, and except when they were in school or went, well chaperoned, to divine service at the meeting house, they never saw each other.

Their lot was not a happy one. We all know the sadistic cruelty of the young. The lad who goes to a new school today has a hard time until he's proved himself to be the equal of the class bully, or till the novelty of hazing him wears off. But Kundre and her brother had to face the taunts and insults of their classmates endlessly. No one wished to sit with them or share a hornbook with them. If, maddened by the spiteful things said of his mother Micah fought his tormentor and came off winner, his victory was vociferously attributed to witchcraft. If he lost the fight the victor called on all to witness how heaven had helped the right in overcoming evil.

Both were apt pupils, but their readiness in reading, ciphering and writing caused no commendation from the schoolma'am. She too believed their aptitude infernally inspired and made no secret of it. So successful recitations were rewarded by an acid reference to their mother's compact with the Evil One. Failure brought a caning.

In all the dreary monotone of life the one highlight for Kundre was Hosea Newton. It may seem strange that the son of her mother's fiercest persecutor should prove her only friend, but it was no stranger than the contrast between Hosea and his mother. Where she was angular and acid and sharp-tongued he was inclined to plumpness, slow of speech and even-tempered. When all the little girls drew their skirts back from Kundre as from diabolic pollution, he chose a seat beside her on the form, and shared his primer with her and, to the scandal of the class, often gave her tidbits from the ample luncheon which his mother packed for him each morning. When Charity Wilkins accused Kundre of stealing a new thimble from her he found the missing bauble concealed in Charity's pocket and pulled her hair until she admitted her fault. Charity's big brother Benjamin took up the lists for his sister, whereupon Hosea entered combat with enthusiasm and left Benjamin with a bloody nose and greatly chastened tongue.

But this little interlude of friendship had disastrous results. Goodwife Wilkins went to Abigail, who, horrified that her son had espoused the witch-child's cause, took him forthwith to Reverend Silas Middleton, who quoted Scriptual texts to him— "Evil communications corrupt good manners—" exhorted him, prayed over him and finally caned him soundly.

After that Hosea had to content himself with smiling at Kundre over his primer. All speech between them was forbidden, and though the Reverend Middleton's precepts had made but small impression on Hosea, he had a vivid memory of the thrashing that accompanied them.

THE quiet of the lazy years flowed over Danby like a placid river. In the harbor the tall ships shook out their wings and sped to the far corners of the earth and presently came back again with holds filled with strange merchandise. Or perhaps they did not come back, and the women put on mourning clothes and there were new stones in the churchyard, with empty graves beneath them. King Philip's

War was fought and won and the settlers needed to fear Indian raids no longer. But in the main life just went on and on. Its groove was deepened, but the course and pattern never changed.

Hosea Newton went away to Harvard College where he was to be trained for the ministry, Micah worked at the rope-walk, harboring black resentment in his heart, but not daring to give tongue to it; Kundre toiled in Goody Stiles' workroom from sunrise to sunset. She proved a clever needle-woman and her work was eagerly bought up, but she had no credit for it. Goodwife Stiles displayed the dresses proudly, and accepted compliments with modest grace, but she never told whose agile fingers fashioned them. In this she showed sound business sense, for many of her customers would have hesitated to wear garments made by a witch-child. And then—

One evening in late summer Kundre lay in Goodman Stiles' oat field. She had worked hard all day, her eyes and muscles ached, and she was so tired that she could have cried with it, but now she had a little respite. The earth felt warm and comforting to her cramped muscles, she seemed to draw vitality from it while a little breeze played through the bearded grain, making it rustle softly, like a bride's dress.

A bride's dress! Kundre thought. Other maids went to the meeting house or stood up in their own homes in stiff, rustling taffety while the parson joined them to the men of their choice. Was she forever doomed to tread the earth in loneliness, to find no lover, no friend, even, in the whole world? It seemed a hard fate for a maid as well-favored as she.

Kundre knew that she had beauty. Unlike her mother, she was little; little and slender with gray eyes and a soft-lipped, rather sad smile. Her hair, despite the severe braids in which she wore it, was positively thrilling in its beauty. Paler than her mother's, it had the sweet amber-gold of melted honey in dark lights and the vivid sheen of burnished silver when the sunshine fell on it. There was a sort of aristocratic fragility hinted at by her arched, slender neck and delicately-cut profile, her hands were so slight that she wore child's mittens in cold weather, and the cast-off shoon of neighbors' half-grown daughters were too large for her, even when she wore the thickest woolen stockings.

But now she had kicked off the rough brogans and stripped the heavy cotton stockings off and drew her naked, gleaming feet up under her as she half sat, half lay upon the warm and friendly earth. She rested her elbow upon a bent knee, outlining her chin with her fingers as she looked toward the blue, distant hills. How would it seem, she wondered, to have someone look at her in friendship, speak a kindly word to her, perhaps—her pulses quickened at the daring thought—tell her she was beautiful?

A footstep sounded at the margin of the field and she crouched like a little partridge when it hears the hunter coming. If she were very still perhaps whoever came would pass her by unseeing. She had no wish to be seen. Since early childhood she had never known a friendly look or word, except—

The footsteps came still nearer, swishing through the nodding grain, and now she heard a man's voice humming softly:

Wish and fulfilment can severed be ne'er,
Nor the thing prayed for come short of the prayer—

"I crave thy pardon, mistress!" Unaware of Kundre crouching in her covet he had almost trodden on her. A flush suffused his face as he stepped backward hurriedly and almost lost his balance in the process.

"I had no business trespassing on Neigh-

bor Stiles' land—why, Kundre, lass, is't truly thou? How lovely thou art grown!" he broke off in surprised delight and to her utter, blank amazement, dropped down to the ground beside her. "It must be full three years since I have seen thee," he added.

Kundre looked at him in wonder. At first it had been but a man she saw, and men, almost as much as women, were her natural enemies, for she had led an odd and hunted life, and like an animal knew the world of men and women only through the blows it dealt her. But as she looked into the smiling friendly face she felt the blood flow into her cheeks and bring sudden warmth to her brow, for it was Hosea Newton sitting by her in the oat field, Hosea Newton's voice, all rich with friendly laughter, asked how she did, and —her heart beat so that she could hardly breathe—Hosea Newton has just said that she was lovely.

The years had been kind to him. Strongly made, wide-shouldered, he was still not burly, only big; and his face was undeniably handsome. He had a short upper lip and a square jaw with a dimple in it, blue eyes set wide apart beneath dark, curving brows, and lightly curling dark hair that fitted his well-formed head like a cap.

"Art glad to see me?" he asked frankly, and Kundre sat in thoughtful silence for a while before she answered softly:

"I am not sure, Hosea. In all the world thou art the only person who has spoken kindly to me since my mother—died—but once, I recollect, thou suffered for thy kindness to me. Now—"

"Now," he mimicked laughing, "I'll dare the parson or the elders to admonish me. I am my own man, Kundre, and think what thoughts I choose, say what I will and go with whom I please.

"Aye," he added as she answered nothing, "I've thought a deal about things, Kundre, and what I think might not make pleasant hearing for the parson and the elders, or my mother, either. I've seen the Quakers whipped and hanged and branded for their faith's sake, seen helpless, innocent old women go tottering to the gallows tree for witchcraft that they never worked, and could not work, and seen the men who call themselves God's ministers work lustily in Satan's vineyard."

"Thou thinkest, then—" she asked him with a quaver in her voice—"it may be possible my mother was no witch—"

"No more a witch than any other," he replied. "Though I speak of the flesh that bore me, I say that those who swore her life away are tainted with the blood of innocence—why, Kundre, lass, what aileth thee?"

The girl had flung her arms about him and was sobbing out her heart against his shoulder. For almost twenty years she'd led a pariah's life, hounded, scorned and persecuted, and the memory of her mother had been rubbed into her breaking heart like salt in a raw wound. Now here at last was one who had a kind word for her mother, who dared suggest she had not merited a felon's shameful death.

What happened then was like a chemical reaction in its spontaneity. It may have been that pity which is said to be akin to love inspired him to put his arms about her as she sobbed against his shoulder, but in the fraction of a heart-beat there was no questioning the emotion that possessed him. From him to her, and from her to him, there seemed to flow a mystic fluid—a sort of intangible soul-substance —that met and mingled like the waters of two rivers at their confluence and merged them into each other until they were not twain, but one.

IT WAS an odd idyl, this romance of a man whose childhood had been spent in the house with a bawling woman and this woman whose whole life had been

warped by hatred and suspicion. To say that they loved at first sight would not be accurate. Each had carried the image of the other in his heart since childhood, in each the thought of the other had been present constantly, not consciously, any more than they were conscious of the hearts that beat beneath their breasts, but always there, the greatest, most important, most vital thing in either of their lives. Now they were aware of it with blinding, dazzling suddenness. The glory of it almost stunned them.

Every evening when her work for Goody Stiles was done Kundre hurried to the oat field, and always he was there to greet her and come hurrying with uplifted hands to take her in his arms.

Judged by modern free-and-easy standards they were inhibited in their love-making. They hardly kissed at all, and when they did it was a chaste embrace which brother and sister might have exchanged. But she would put her hand in his and turn it till her soft palm rested on his and her little fingers made a soft and gentle pattern of his own, then rest her head against his shoulder till her gleaming hair was on his cheek, its perfume fresh and sweet as that of the green growing things about them.

I said theirs was an odd love. So it was. A love compounded partly of loneliness, partly of heart-hunger, partly of true, honest friendship; not without its moments of passion, but entirely without the savage, selfish hunger of passion; not lacking ecstacy, but with the ecstacy of love fulfilled, not satiated.

They did not talk much. There was small need of words, for that mysterious warm current, strong as a rising ocean tide, flowed constantly between them, fusing their two selves in one. And when they came to say good night the sweet pain of their parting was itself a compensation for the day-long separation facing them.

Then came catastrophe, as dreadful and as unexpected as a thunder-bolt hurled from a cloudless sky. Her brother Micah ran away from his master. It was either flight or murder, for despite the expert way in which he did his work old Goodman Belkton found fault with him constantly, and his fellow 'prentices, not slow to take their cue from the master, taunted him with his mother's conviction and intimated that he used her devilish arts to make his handiwork the best the 'walk turned out.

Runaway apprentices were fair game for anyone, and Goodman Belkton offered a reward of two pounds for the stray's return, so when four sturdy louts saw Micah on the dock at Salem Town, about to sign before the mast for a voyage to the Indies, they set on him and bound him with a length of rope and dragged him back to Danby.

But while they were still in the Danby suburbs they had been set upon by a ferocious heifer that gored one of them sorely, knocked down another, and put them all so utterly to flight that their prisoner escaped and joined his ship at Salem before she sailed with the tide. They brought their wounded comrade into Danby, where, over sundry mugs of potent rum-and-water, they had a wondrous story to relate.

The cow that set on them had been no ordinary cow, it seemed, but a demon beast whose nostrils breathed forth fiery flames, and which announced *in human words,* "I'll soon set thee free from this scum, my brother!"

This all happened in the early evening, but before it was too dark for them to see the demon beast go tearing off across a meadow when its fell work had been done and suddenly sit down upon the sod like a woman, straddle a long fence-rail like a witch that mounts a broom, and fly shrieking off across the sky toward Goodman Stiles' oat field.

And where had Kundre been while this was happening? Her mistress asked her pointblank, and pointblank she refused to answer. And there the matter might have rested, perhaps, if Jonathan Sawyer, a laborer on Goodman Williams' plantation, had not volunteered the information that at nine o'clock the night before he'd seen her hurrying from Stiles' oat field and heard her singing something not to be found in the hymn book.

It seemed hardly necessary for the constable to call a *posse comitatus* of trained bandsmen to arrest her, or to summon Parson Middleton to lend them spiritual assistance. But so he did, and with martial clank of sword and pike and musket, and with the Parson with his Book beneath his arm, they went to Goodwife Stiles' house and formally took Kundre into custody, bound her wrists together with the constable's spare bridle, put a horse's leading-strap about her neck and marched her through the streets to Danby jail, where they lodged her with a double guard before the door.

HOSEA NEWTON roused from a deep, dream-tormented sleep, completely conscious, every faculty alert. His room was buried in a darkness blinding as a black cloak, for the moon had set long since, and a cloud-veil obscured the stars. Some instinct, some sentinel of the spirit that stands watch while we are sleeping, told him he was not alone, but he could see or hear nothing.

All day he'd raged through Danby Town like a madman, calling on the parson and the constable and even the high magistrate to intercede for Kundre. She was no witch, he vowed, but a sweet, pure maid who held his heart in the cupped palms of her two little hands. The ruffrans who had told the story of the demon heifer were a lot of drunken, craven liars, seeking to excuse their prisoner's escape with this wild tale. He'd prove it; he would range the countryside until he'd found the cow that bested them and lead her singlehanded to the pound for all to see she was a natural beast.

The parson and the constable and magistrate were sympathetic listeners, but one and all refused to help him in his trouble. The woman was a witch, the vowed and dedicated votary of Satan—like mother, like daughter. Could any natural cow put four strong men to flight, and they all armed with stout cudgels? And, most especially, could a natural beast bestride a fence-rail and sail through the sky on it? "Poor boy, thou art bewitched by this vile whelp from Satan kennels," they told him.

"But fear not, poor, befuddled lad, tomorrow we shall prove that thy infatuation is the devil's work, for on the town common at sunrise we shall prick the witchling with long pins until we find the devil's mark, and thou shalt see she is in very truth a servant of the Prince of Darkness."

He'd tried to see her in the jail, but the trained bandsmen turned him back. No one must see the witch until she had passed through the ordeal, even the turnkey was forbidden to go near her or to look into her cell. How should she eat and wherewith should she quench her thirst? Let Beelzebub her master see to that. They were Christian men and had no traffic with the servants of Satan.

Finally, worn out in body and in spirit, he had come home, refused his supper—could he take food while Kundre starved?—and thrown himself upon his bed, full-dressed, to fall into a sleep of utter exhaustion.

Desperate men make desperate plans, and Hosea was desperate. It did not matter to him whether she were good or bad or innocent or guilty. He loved her and would not desert her. If the court found her guilty—and accusation was equivalent

to conviction—he would denounce himself as a wizard, and hang with her upon the gallows tree. She should not go to that dark land beyond the grave alone.

What was it? Something stirred in the soft darkness of the room; a shadow moving in the shadows, a rat that came to forage in the dark?

He knew that it was none of these, for in the gloom that blotted out the outlines of the furniture he saw a gleam of light, or rather lightness, like a cloud of faintly luminous vapor swirling from an unseen boiling kettle.

Slowly it spread, wafting upward, and now he saw the outlines of a figure in it, and the blood churned in his ears, his throat grew tight, and at the pit of his stomach he seemed to feel a burning and a freezing, all at once.

"Who—what art thou?" he croaked hoarsely, and the sound of his own frightened voice was terrifying in the haunted darkness.

No answer came to his challenge, but the figure looming faintly in the mist-cloud seemed taking on a kind of substance. Now he could see it quite clearly, and the terror which engulfed him seemed to be an icy flood that paralyzed his heart and brain and muscles.

Yet notwithstanding his terror he felt a kind of admiration for the phantom. It was a woman, tall as a tall man, yet with a calm and regal beauty wholly feminine. Across the low white brow a spate of gold-hued hair fell flowing to her knees, and from the perfect contour of her face great eyes of zenith-blue looked at him under brows of startling blackness. She was dressed in widow's weeds; a chain and pendant of some dull, lack-luster metal hung about her throat.

He knew her! He had been a little lad scarce eight years old when Goodman Stiles had raised him to his shoulder that he might see the hangman Peter Grimes work the court's sentence on Kundre Maltby, the witch-woman. With a sudden pang of recollection he recalled how he had thought it a great pity that so much beauty should be vowed to Satan and hanged upon the gallows tree and entombed in the earth.

"What—" by supreme effort he forced speech between palsied lips—"what wouldst thou with me, Kundre Maltby?"

"Wilt take my help, Hosea Newton?" asked the specter, and her voice was cold and desolate as December storm-wind blowing over pine-capped hills.

Hosea hesitated in his answer, and well he might. The wraith, if wraith it were, was that of a condemned witch-woman, hanged for sorcery, and, presumably, made fast in hell. He might have been in advance of his time, but he was part and parcel of his generation, and since Deuteronomy was penned men had regarded witches as disciples of the Evil One. To traffic with them was forbidden under pain of death and loss of soul. This was a witch's ghost, as dreadful as the witch herself, perhaps more dreadful, since she had burned in hell for twenty years, and he must make the choice of taking aid from her or bidding her begone. There was no middle course; he must hold true to all the teachings that had been instilled in him since infancy and bid her avaunt, or make compromise with Evil incarnate and put his soul in dreadful jeopardy—to what end? Did not the writings of the Fathers teach that Satan is the arch-deceiver? Would he keep the compact offered by this messenger from hell?

Then came the thought of Kundre, little Kundre, starved and thirsting, languishing in prison till the morrow, when they'd strip her to her shift in sight of all the town and pierce her tender flesh with long, cruel pins—a thousand thousand years of burning hell would be a bargain-price to pay for her deliverance.

"Say on, O spirit of my Kundre's mother," he commanded. "I'll take the help thou offerest me, and pay the price thou asketh."

The phantom raised one white, almost transparent hand and loosed the medal from its neck. "Take this," it bade, and it seemed that its ghostly voice was stronger, warmer. "Hie with it to the jail house and cut away the bars that pen her in. Then fly across the border southward —my time is sped, I must e'en go!"

The voice stopped suddenly, as though a hand had been laid on the specter's throat, and like an April snowflake melting in the rising sun of spring, the faintly-shining vision merged back in the darkness.

He could not say if it had been a vivid dream or if a visitant had come to him, but presently he rose and struck a flint-spark in his tinderbox and lit a tallow dip. There on the floor beside his bed lay a medallion of dull metal, not lead nor iron, but apparently a mixture of the two, fixed to a length of slender chain of the same sheenless substance. Curiously, he noted that his hands were soiled with fresh earth and his fingernails broken, as though he had been burrowing like a woodchuck. Yet he knew he had not left his chamber since he flung himself upon the bed and fell asleep.

Or had he? We may wonder. Might he not have been the victim of somnambulism, and risen to go scraping at the earth that covered Kundre Maltby's body in the churchyard, then, still asleep, come back with the mysterious medal? The thought did not occur to him, but in the light of modern psychological experiments we may entertain it.

At any rate he recognized the medallion and took it in his hand. It was quite plain on one side and engraved with characters he could not read upon the other. Its edge was rounded like that of a milled coin, and though it was no larger than a penny it weighed as much as a gold sovereign.

What was it that the ghost had ordered him to do? "Hie with it to the jail house and cut away the bars that pen her in."

With this dull piece of soft metal? He was about to fling the medal from him in disgust when the echo of the ghostly voice seemed coming to him through the candlelight-stained darkness. "Hurry, hurry, lover of the falsely-accused, or it will be too late!"

He knew what cell they'd lodged her in, the same in which her mother languished twenty years ago. It was on the ground floor of the prison, and by standing on his tiptoes he could look through the barred window.

If they caught him skulking round the jail house— What matter? He was resolved to die with her, why not share prison with her ere they hanged him?

DANBY jail loomed dimly, a darker darkness in the starless night, as Hosea approached it, treading noiselessly in stockinged feet. "Kundre," he whispered softly as he tapped upon the stone sill of her cell window. "Can'st hear me, dearest love?"

"Is't thou, my very dearest?" the girl's reply came to him through the formless darkness. "Oh, Hosea—" He heard her sobs, the small, sad sounds of utter misery, as her voice broke.

"Aye, heart o' mine, 'tis I, and I have come to tell thee that thou shalt not go alone—come closer, love, stretch out thy hands to me—"

"I cannot, dearest one; they've chained me to the wall as if I were a rabid cur—"

Hosea clenched his teeth in fury and, unthinking, drove his hand against the prison bars. It was the hand in which he clasped the witch's medal, and as it struck the bar he drew back with a startled ex-

clamation. The heavy, hand-forged iron had melted from contact with the medal as if it had been tallow touched by flame.

In a moment he was sawing at the window-bars with the mysterious coin, cutting them away as if they had been cheese. Silently he laid them on the turf outside the prison window, then, when he had an opening large enough to crawl through, let himself inside the cell and felt his way toward her.

They wasted no time in reunion or premature rejoicings. With her hand on his to guide it he pressed the witch's coin against the iron collar locked around her neck, and laid the fetter on the straw-strewn cell floor carefully, lest its clanking rouse the guard who waited in the corridor outside. Then, step by cautious step, he led her to the window.

Hand in hand they crept along the shadowed street until they reached the stable where his mother's horses stamped before their mangers. In a moment he had saddled the best beast and led it out, swung her to the saddle-bow before him and set out toward the southern bounary of the town. They dared not trot or gallop lest the pounding of the horse's hoofs arouse the neighbors, but presently they reached the churchyard, and he drove his heels into the stallion's flanks.

"Wait, wait, my dear," she begged him as they passed the white-spired meeting house, "I would say farewell to my mother ere we shake the dust of Danby from our shoon forever."

"Aye," he conceded, lowering her to the ground. "That is but fitting, sweetling. We are indebted to thy mother for thy liberty tonight."

Together they walked to the grave, and while the girl knelt on the moss that rimmed the stone he looked down at her pensively. He wondered why his conscience did not trouble him. Tonight he had accepted diabolic aid, made compromise with Evil. Even now he had the witch-wife's medal in his pocket—he drew the flat metallic disc out to look at it. Should he take it with him, or return it to the grave? he wondered, then wondered more at what was happening. The coin seemed straining at his fingers, as if a thin, invisible thread were pulling it, or it had volition of its own and sought release from his grasp.

But, strangely, the pull was all in one direction, toward the foot of Kundre Maltby's grave.

Wonderingly, he stepped in the direction of the tug, and noticed that it increased sharply, then seemed to bear straight down toward the earth.

He dropped upon his knees. The coin seemed guiding his hand toward the tombstone and, still marveling, he reached in the direction that it indicated. His fingers touched the long grass growing by the stone and found an opening like a woodchuck's burrow. Inside was something stiff and hard, yet slightly pliable, like old, oiled leather.

He grasped the object, tugged at it and brought it out. It was a leather sack, well smeared with tallow, stiff with age and long entombment in the earth, but wholly intact. A wax seal held the cord that bound its mouth, but this crumbled as he touched it. Inside were several smaller sacks, some of soft buckskin, some of coarse linen, and in them were bright English sovereigns, round silver Spanish dollars, and gleaming articles of jewelry. The mystery of Kundre Maltby's lost fortune was solved. She had buried it beneath the stone that marked her husband's empty grave, and when they went to scoop the hollow to receive her body they had used only the upper portion of the grave.

Hosea chuckled as he realized what had happened. The diggers' spades had been within a hand's-width of the treasure, yet none had suspected it.

Witchcraft? Perhaps, but very fortunate witchcraft for him and Kundre. A moment since they had had nothing but the clothes they stood in and the stolen stallion; now they were rich. Their life would not be hard—if they could get away.

The night was tiring rapidly as they rode into the woodland. Long streaks of gray were showing in the eastern sky, small noises came to them, the chirp of crickets and the sleepy murmurs of awakening birds, but on and on they rode, secure in the knowledge that Danby jail had no bloodhounds to pursue them, and their escape could not be known till sunrise, for no one, jailor, or turnkey or guard, would dare go near the witch's cell till full daylight.

THE Newport Quakers greeted them hospitably, and when they found that they had money offered them letters to the first citizens of Philadelphia.

In two days they took passage on a sloop bound for the Delaware, and, once on the high sea, were married by the master. So Kundre Maltby and Hosea Newton, children of seafaring Danby skippers, plighted troth upon the ocean, with the singing of the wind in the rigging for wedding march and the skirking mewl of sea gulls for a prothalamium.

They were not the first, nor, unhappily, the last to be driven from their homse by ignorance and bigotry masquerading as religion, but in Philadelphia they found such peace and happiness as never could have been theirs in New England. Their house stood on a tall hill overlooking the wide Schuylkill and the prosperous little Quaker city, and there their family multiplied until they had four sons and three daughters.

It was an evening in mid-April, the anniversary of her father's death at Captain Newton's hand, if she known it, that Kundre stood with Hosea on the porch of their mansion and watched the lights of Philadelphia quench out against the darkness. Honora, their last-born daughter, had been christened in the afternoon, and now, all vestige of original sin washed from her, was slumbering as peacefully as any cherub in the nursery.

"Look, heart of mine," bade Kundre, "all those good folk go to their rest down yonder. They are a kind and gentle people, and I know their dreams are of a better world."

"Aye, dearest," he slipped an arm round her, "a better world, in truth. Not in some dim, misty Promised Land on t'other side of Jordan, but here in this same world we live in. There'll come a time, my sweet, when men with lofty dreams shall waken at a great tomorrow's dawn and find their dreams still there, and nothing vanished but the night."

THE Bishop brought his story to a close and looked from Dr. Bentley to the younger clergyman with a quizzical twinkle in his eye. "I shan't ask you to pass judgment," he said. "Whether Hosea Newton should have scorned the witch's offer—or whether he received it, for that matter—are purely academic questions today. I'm pretty sure though," he chuckled, "that if he had refused it I should not be here this evening."

"How's that, sir?" asked young Dr. Kitteringson.

"Well, you see, Hosea Newton was my great-grandfather, several times removed, and his wife, the witch's child, my ancestress. So was the witch, for that matter."

"And the witch's coin?" asked Dr. Kitteringson. "Do you know what became of it?"

"Yes," answered Bishop Chauncey. "Here it is." He thrust two fingers in his waistcoat pocket and produced a little metal disc which might have been silver,

but wasn't, flat and plain on one side, marked with faint traces of old Nordic runes upon the other. "I've carried it as a lucky piece for years," he added. "My grandfather carried it all through the Civil War and never had a wound; my father had it with him at San Juan Hill and came off without a scratch. I lugged it through the Argonne and came out safely, but once when I left it on my dressing table in Paris I was run down by a taxicab before I had a chance to cross the street."

Dr. Kitteringson was handling the strange coin gingerly, half curiously, half fearfully. "You've tested it for magic powers?" he asked.

"Good gracious, no, son. I don't suppose it has any, and—good heavens, look!"

Young Dr. Kitteringson had taken up the fire shovel and drawn the coin's blunt edge across its gleaming brass bowl. Where the medal touched the brass it cut a kerf as easily as if it had been pressed through softened tallow.

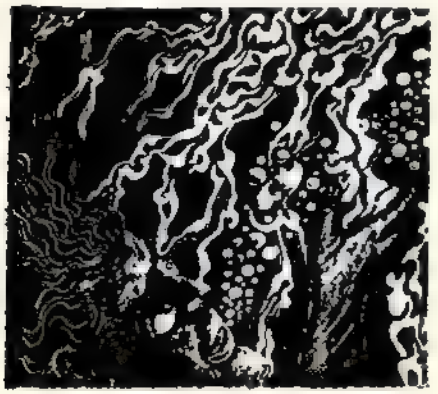
"Great Scott, Bishop—Dick!" exclaimed Dr. Bentley. "What do you think of that?"

The Bishop dropped the witch's coin back in his waistcoat pocket and held his glass out toward his host. His hand was shaking slightly, but his eyes and voice were steady. "I think I'd like another drop of brandy; quickly, if you please," he answered.

A Mangrove Swamp

LOOK how the slow fat bubbles break in rings,
As though a man were stifling underneath.
The black stagnating water by no breath
Is stirred, a mirror for all evil things.

The long roots writhing upward from the mud,
Like fingers crooked in lust or pain or greed,
Have pendent tresses of putrescent weed,
Like dead men's hair clogged stiff with their own blood.



No light of flowers nor songs of birds dispel
The silent, stealthy horror of the place.
Only a ripple o'erspreads the water's face
At times, like soundless, dreadful mirth in hell.

Only the gray mists come and go beneath
The pallid shadows of the sickly moon;
Only dead voices in the night breeze croon
A drear and melancholy masque of death.

BY WILLIAM DE LISLE

Not All Mountain Music . . .

When we asked Manly Wellman how he came to dream up the "Flying Horned One," and that terrible creature's various cohorts, in his novelette *Coven* — he said that he didn't want to sound like a crackpot, but that back of his yarn (and many more in WT!) are the grains of pretty unsavory truth. . . . He wrote us:

Behind and beyond the simple story-mechanics of *Coven* is my constantly growing conviction that American witchcraft—as a cult, a folklore belief, and perhaps as a real power—can't be passed off with a laugh.

The basis of this story, like many more I have written for WEIRD TALES, is truth. A real scholar, like Lovecraft, would have been deeply rewarded by prying and probing into customs and actions of certain Ozark natives I've met. Life there is not all mountain music. Very strong is the recurrence of reports concerning a winged, horned entity that organized men and women into little black-magic bands, as in the present story. Of course, the same being is noted as having fought Strap Buckner in Texas; and not far from where I sit are people who swear to have seen and heard the flapping, roaring monster named "The Jersey Devil."

As usual, my spells, book references and so on are taken from rare but real sources. And the suggestion of explanation at the end, than which many explanations of demonology are worse, I heard in the South from the solid, bearded old frontier gentleman whose real character contributes much to my delineation of the Reverend Mr. Jaeger.

Perhaps I should offer apologies to the friend who will recognize the whole first episode—the Vampire of Shiloh—as what he told me for the simple truth. Since he does not seek to be writer or historian, I do not think that I have stolen from him. In any case, he is probably lucky to be alive this moment after such an experience. Let that comfort him.

Manly Wade Wellman.

Weird Tales Recommended Reading in High Schools . . .

Do you remember *The Hollow Moon* by Everil Worrell — published in WEIRD TALES? Well, when Miss Worrell sent us her latest creation (*The High Tower*, spooky fifth-column tale in this issue) she told us that the Hollow Moon enjoyed a scholastic as well as a "fantastic" success! . . .

From Washington, D. C. she writes:

I am one of the old writers for W.T., my last having been *The Hollow Moon* a couple of years or so ago. I'm afraid I'm one of the writers that some of the fans like and some do not, however, I have been wanting to tell WEIRD TALES readers something about *The Hollow Moon* which I don't think very many fantasy writers are going to be able to duplicate, and which gave me an unexpected thrill.

My story *The Hollow Moon* has been used in at least one Washington, D. C., junior high school as recommended reading required of science students, and used similarly in a high school (senior) in Norfolk, Virginia!

That, I thought, was something one of us W.T. writers would not expect, and as I said, I was really thrilled. . . .

I have often intended to compliment W.T. on its present high standard. At the risk of sacrilege, I find more variety in its pages than before, and am glad to encounter types of weirdness that don't always dissolve in a heap of ill-smelling viscous fluid with ululations—at the risk, even of offending the "Old Ones" I say it.

I am constitutionally a great admirer of Seabury Quinn, whom I know. I have a new enthusiasm in the Counselman stories. I enjoy a bit of

Foremen!

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weird psychology, and think it something that should have been done more before.

Everil Worrell.

Glad to see de Grandin Back

Henry Barnett writes from Crystal City, Missouri:

Here are a few words of comment on the May issue of WEIRD TALES. I was delighted to see de Grandin back in *Stoneman's Memorial;* Quinn gets first place.

Very strange and enchanting was Dorothy Quick's little tale *The Enchanted River.* An exotic and thrilling romance which I would elect the best of Dorothy Quick's stories to date. Second place.

Greye la Spina's *The Deadly Theory* was both horrifying and fascinating. It should have been much longer than it was, however. I hope she gives us more stories of this caliber. Third place.

The rest of the stories were very good, but Mr. Kuttner can give us a better one next time.

Now Knows What It's Like to Be a Vampire!

From Washington, D. C., Rosella Rands writes:

Really the last two issues of WEIRD TALES have been superb. *Masquerade* is a story I'll long remember. I've always wondered what it was like to be a vampire. This answer really sets one to thinking.

I like that rogue ship with *Vengeance in Her Bones.* I hereby suggest that an association be formed to recover and repair the *Sadie Saxon.* In a war like this she's much too valuable to lose. Of course, it will be necessary to get author Malcolm Jameson to tell us the exact latitude and longitude where she sank. . . . !

Out of the Night

From Brooklyn, N. Y., L. L. Mockler writes.

It was nice to see that Greye la Spina had come out from obscurity on a farm to give us one of her stories. Here's hoping to see more of her work.

WEIRD BOOKS RENTED

Books by Lovecraft, Merritt, Quinn, etc., rented by mail. 3c a day plus postage. Write for free list. WEREWOLF LENDING LIBRARY, 621 Maryland Dr., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Is the Devil a Gentleman?

We've been asking ourselves that question—and we haven't been able to decide. What do you think? *Can* there be a compromise with evil? Even the author, Seabury Quinn, doesn't seem to know . . . for in reply to our query he tells us:

Is the Devil a Gentleman?, like *Roads*, is more a mystical story than a weird tale; but like its predecessor in that genre, I believe it will meet with pretty widespread approval. Also that it will provoke some discussion.

Frankly, it's a question story. Whether Kundre Maltby was a witch at all, whether she appeared as a ghost to her future son-in-law, whether he actually compromised with evil or whether he was the victim of a vivid dream and a case of somnambulism—all these are questions which are continually raised through the course of the story, and which I have carefully avoided answering.

Like an advocate, I've merely presented the evidence in the case, but unlike an advocate, I've forborn to argue from the evidence; hence the jury of readers must reach their verdict without help or hints from me.

This kind of story can't be very often done, and when it's done at all has to be superlatively well done, or it falls flat on its face.

With that modesty which is such a besetting sin of mine I'm willing to admit that it's superlatively well done; and also to say that I shouldn't care to try another tale of the same sort for a good long while, since I don't want the readers to run me ragged.

Incidentally, have you ever wondered how many people threatened to shoot Cleveland Moffett to pieces for writing *The Mysterious Card*?

Background for the story? Sure. Turn to page 117 of the Cambridge edition of the poems of John Greenleaf Whittier. There it all is, beautifully outlined for you, except for the Bishop and the witch's coin and a few little things which I thought up my own self.

Seabury Quinn.

READERS' VOTE

COVEN	THE HIGH TOWER
LANSING'S LUXURY	POOR LITTLE TAMPICO
THE GUN	HERBERT WEST: REANIMATOR
FOR TOMORROW WE DIE	THE REDOUBTABLE HORACE GOPPENDYKE
DEAD SILENCE	IS THE DEVIL A GENTLEMAN?

Here's a list of ten stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales—then clip it out and mail it into us.

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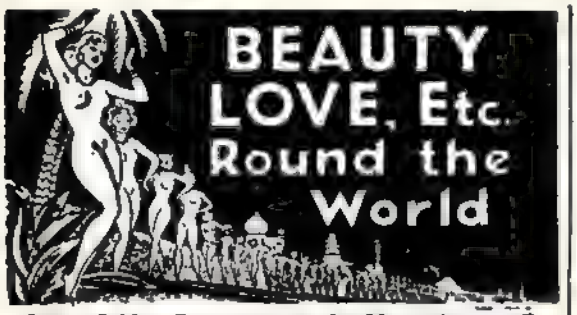

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• A membership card carrying the above design—personal token of your fellowship with the weird and the fantastic—will be sent on request. (A stamped, addressed envelope should be enclosed.)

How to Sell Your Soul
(Explicit Instructions!)

Since joining the Weird Tales Club, I have certainly received letters from a lot of very interesting people, these letters have come from all over the world, from Alaska to Australia and South Africa. And many other places in-between.

Most of the letters want to know all about the Witch books I wrote about in my first letter to you that was published. (The Runes-for-Good-and-Ill, and Herbs-to-Cure-the-Sick-and-Plague-the-Living.) While some of the letters are from people who seem to think that I associate with Devils, Ghouls, and Vampires as they would with their next door neighbors. Which is not the case at all. . . .

I am enclosing a simple spell from the Book-of-Runes, that the readers of WEIRD TALES may try out if they like. Though if they should happen to raise up a devil, and have difficulty sending him back to hell again they shouldn't blame me.

The spell is one to call up an imp bearing a talisman from the devil, which when worn upon the person will have the power to bring riches

beyond the person wearing its wildest dreams. (Or so the book says.) Of course the person receiving the devil's gift will have to sign the devil's register, wherein he agrees to let the devil have his soul after a period of years that the person signing will himself agree upon, (The devil can afford to wait a hundred years or so, as after that he will have the soul for all eternity.).

The spell is as follows: First draw you a double pentagon, two circles having six points each, with a third circle touching the outer points of the outer pentagon. You now have three circles, the two inner ones having six points each. Between the points of the outer pentagon six daggers are placed, with their points outward. Next six bowls of meal are placed between the six points of the inner pentagon. Last of all a square is drawn around the whole thing so that its lines are about three feet from the outer circle. In each corner of this square a star with a circle around it is drawn. Now kneeling toward the west chant the following Rune. (With the eyes shut.)

Black Goat dancing in smokey halls,
List to the voice of one who calls,
One who is willing his soul to sell,
To possess your gift the talisman from hell,
The gift to bring riches, and power, and gain,
And pleasures untold as the drops of rain,
Send up your Imp the book I'll sign,
I'll take your gift and give you mine.

Open your eyes and if the spell has been successful you will see the imp standing between the square and outer circle. Have him toss you the book. (You must not let him touch you.)

Sign the book with the stylas attached to it and do not toss it back until he tosses you the talisman. Do not think that you can trick the devil by refusing to give back the book after you have both book and talisman in the pentagon, because as soon as you leave the pentagon they both will vanish, and he will send terrible vengeance against you. As soon as you toss the book to the imp bid him be gone in the name of The-Father-the-Son-and-the-Holy-Ghost . . . which he will do in a flash of smoke and fire.

There is the spell and Rune, translated from the Basque language as closely as I could. I hope the readers like it, and if so I would like to hear from some more of them.

Wishing you, and the Club all the success in the world I remain your friend.

Edward Goodell.

R. F. D. No. 6, Argentine Station,
Kansas City, Kansas.

That's a Dangerous Habit, Harriet!

I would like very much to join the Weird Tales Club. I enjoy reading the magazine very much, especially when reading in bed!

Harriet Grossman.

169 Mansion St., Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

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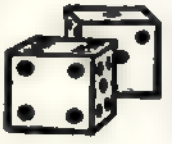
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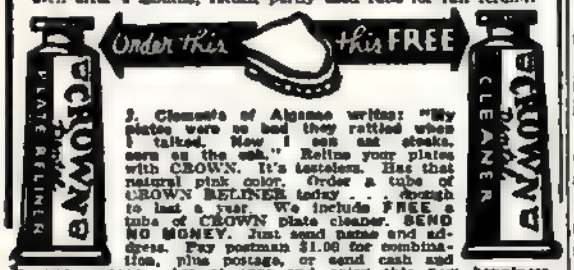

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We're very low on all issues of W.T. for 1940; so we'd be very glad to hear from readers who have copies of these issues which they wish to sell—or who would like to trade them in for newer issues, or any back numbers that they may have missed and would like to read.

If you're interested, please get in touch with the Subscription Department, WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

Fantasy Popular at Fort Jackson

I've been an avid reader of your creepy mag for the past several years, and felt it was high time for me to sound off and let you know how much I enjoy it. The stuff you print certainly is weird and constitutes for me a delicious escape from sordid reality and the monotony of a materialistic world.

In addition, it provides a wealth of delightfully unpleasant material for thought and discussion.

Only a few days ago, while greedily consuming the latest copy, another soldier here noticed it, and inquired about it.

Before I realized it, we were in a one-sided discussion, and new worries were added to his mind, as I presented, via a series of horrendous little anecdotes, the case for the existence of the supernatural. In the midst of this dissertation, a corporal previously unknown to me, entered the ring and proceeded to corroborate my claims, adding his own highly interesting experiments in projecting his astral form, and like things. It developed that he was a student of the occult, also. Then, in walked two other privates, to take part in the conversation, on the pro side.

This all certainly surprised me. Until it happened, I'd no idea the subject was so popular, especially in a down-to-earth army camp. You never know.

Last summer, staying in a small town in Maine, I was astounded to find myself accused by a number of the natives of practicing Black Magic because of their misinterpreting my interest in botany, which took the form of solitary jaunts in the woods collecting lichens, mosses and herbs.

Now, I will appreciate one of those ghastly little membership cards, if you will be so kind. I intend to pass it off as a license to practice the Diabolic arts, to the next villager who suspects me of being a warlock, and confirm his worst fears.

Fiendishly yours,
Pvt. Bruce Laing
H. Q. Btry. 8th Inf. Div. Arty.
Fort Jackson, S. C.

West Virginia Branch

I believe that all fantasy and science-fiction fans in West Virginia should get together and form a "W. Va., Weird Tales Fans Federation." So won't all the members of the Weird Tales Club who reside in W. Va. please contact me by postal

card stating their views on this proposal. Surely there are enough fans in W. Va. to form a federation and keep it going. Perhaps we can, if enough support this effort, set up a constitution for regulation of our aims and efforts, issue a statefanzine, hold a state science-vention and engage in other pursuits to spread and support fantasy and science-fiction. I'm waiting on your views, West Virginia Mountaineers!

K. Eugene Dixon.

Elkhorn, W. Va.

Calling Rocketry Enthusiasts

Early last year, I saw the name of my favorite author, Nelson S. Bond, on one of your covers, bought the magazine, had my introduction to the inimitable Lovecraft, and have since anxiously awaited WT's bi-monthly appearance on the newsstands. I have come to realize that to you, "the tale's the thing," and if occult facts have to be twisted to fit a story, you will let your authors twist and otherwise maltreat them. The lead novelette, *Hell on Earth*, in the March issue, goes rather far in that direction—having to be based on the false premise that formulae for exorcising devils are hard to get, when they are common as cat-pelts—and the three main characters (aside from the "devil"), in order not to bring the story to an abrupt conclusion, must dumbly ignore their success in exorcism with simple sacramentals. Still, it's otherwise a good story, well told, so what the . . . !

Now, here's another thing. The Rocketeers, Manhattan Chapter of the United States Rocket Society, will hold the first scheduled, organizational meeting here (where a permanent meeting place is assured, as I own the house) toward the end of this month, and I feel sure there may be a sufficient number of other rocketry enthusiasts also, as I am, interested in Magick (with a k) and the occult, to form an "Uptown" or "Upper West Side" chapter of the W. T. Club.

With heartiest good wishes for steady increase in strength and growth of the magazine and the club,

Frank McCourt

516 West 140th Street, New York City.

Personal . . .

A Hobohemian occultist with sincere interest and fair knowledge of the black arts, devil worship, and other unusual phrases of life, seeks as a correspondent some unconventional, unusual, and entirely "different" type of weirdling.

Pvt. Herbert Sloane.

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Jerry Scordino, 143 Nevada St., San Francisco, Calif.
John Boland, 827 Troys, Kansas City, Kan.
Vol Molesworth, Del Monte, Kangaroo Pt. Rd., Sylvania, N. S. W., Australia.
Gertrude Martin, 520 Ridge St., Newark, N. J.
Warren Lewis, 1004 Jackson St. N. E., Washington, D. C.
Arthur Young, 710 Montgomery Ave., N. Y. City.
Andrew Smythe, 931 W. Dakota St., Philadelphia, Pa.
Pvt. H. Anchuschak, Fort Knox, Ky.
Charles L. Klein, 211 West 106th St., New York, N. Y.
Betty O. Ussher, 606 Heacock Bldg., Escolta, Manila, P. I.
Edmund Abelson, 434 Surf St., Chicago, Ill.
Martin Ware, 139 Normal St., Chico, Calif.
Nita Owen, 139 Normal St., Chico, Calif.
Stan Kenton, 139 Normal St., Chico, Calif.
Howard Rumsey, 139 Normal St., Chico, Calif.
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M. H. Dirks, 139 Normal St., Chico, Calif.
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M. H. Erwin, 139 Normal St., Chico, Calif.
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Jean Orrendorf, 139 Normal St., Chico, Calif.
Jenny Sauer, 139 Normal St., Chico, Calif.
K. Eugene Dixon, Elkhorn, W. Va.
Pfc. Bob Brown, Battery F, 212th C. A., Gen. Del., Norfolk, Va.
Bob English, 183 Amory St., Jamaica Plains, Boston, Mass.
Miss Rosella Rands, 304 D St. N.E., Wash., D. C.
Banks Mebane, P. O. Box 1139, Wilson, N. C.
Walter Hulette, 955 Monroe Ave., Huntington, W. Va.
Ruth Wheeler, 250 Prospect, Buffalo, N. Y.
Lyman Nash, 468 Tenth St., Red Wing, Minn.
James Madole, 224 East Main St., Beacon, N. Y.
Murray Brown, 328 East Broadway, Mt. Vernon, Ill.
Arthur Robertson, 175 Center St., Brewer, Maine
Bay E. Blair, 430 S. Berkley, Elmhurst, Ill.
Bobby Colston, Van Horne, Iowa
George Stefenelli, 1190 Gates Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.
Miss Fawn Rofey, 69 West 7th N St., Provo, Utah
Denny Larke, 130 Huron Ave., Rogers City, Mich.
Richard Dove, Hdqs. 3306th Co., CCC, Camp Hess, Camp F-264, St. Maries, Idaho
Mrs. Nora Vestal, 758 S. 7th St., Clinton, Ind.
Carl Harlor, Johnson, N. Y.
Bob Wansbrough, 1611 Lagoon Ave., Minneapolis, Minn.
Fred Widner, U. S. A. Troops, Fort Greeley, Kodiak, Alaska
Ludwig Mikol, 646 E. 11th St., New York, N. Y.
Jim Lynch, S. P. O., S 222, c/o British Consul, Boston, Mass.
E. R. Carnes, Gen. Del., Greenville, Ohio (Home address: Box 924, Kalamazoo, Mich.)
Harold Wakefield, 177 Beaconsfield Ave., Toronto, Ont., Canada
Rodney Lee Stimson, 17 Beacon Ave., Auburn, Maine
William E. Morris, Ladysmuth, B. C., Canada
Albert Betts, 18 Wasenna Ave., Toronto, Ont., Canada
P. Slosberg, 180 Washington St., Norwich, Conn.
Lewis Robinson, 26 Franklin St., New Britain, Conn.
Douglas Rutherford, 398 Roselawn Ave., Toronto, Ont., Canada
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Charles Atlas
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